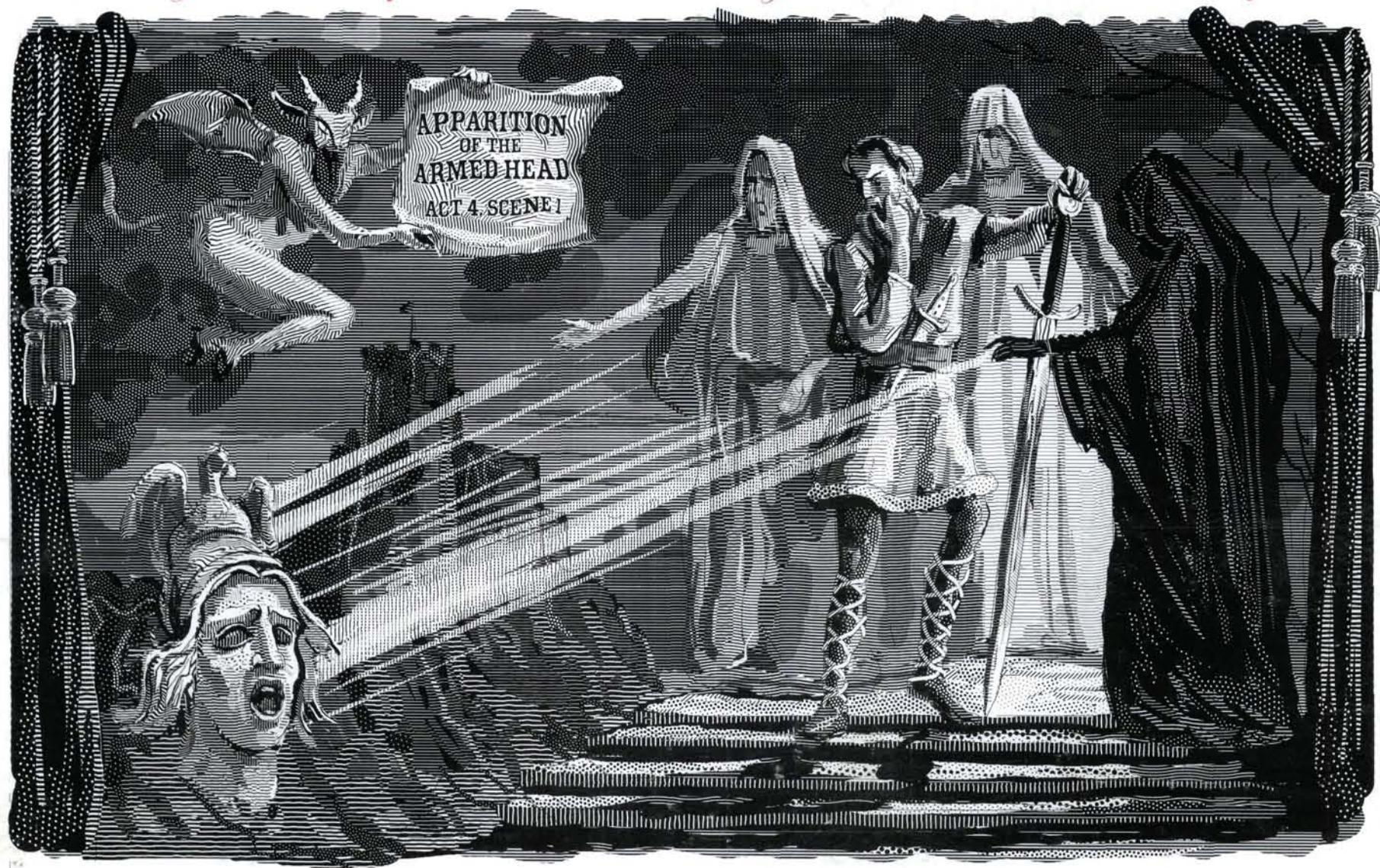


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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

INDECISION 2008

by Charles R. Kesler

ASK REPUBLICANS HOW THEY INTEND TO VOTE IN THE UPCOMING primaries and you often hear, "There are two or three candidates I'd consider voting for...." Press the question, and "I don't know" is the surprisingly common reply.

The uncertainty, felt even by some who've endorsed a candidate, stems from many factors. The primary elections come earlier and thicker than ever this year, intruding on the holidays and the holiday spirit especially of the vanguard voters in Iowa and New Hampshire, but disquieting any American who would like to deliberate about this fateful choice a little longer. There are a lot of Republican contenders to choose from, too, and most are plausible as president.

But the main cause of the perplexity is something else, I think. Republicans lack a clear criterion by which to make up their mind. Not so long ago, that standard would have included a definition of conservatism—ragged at the edges, but still serviceable. But American conservatism's meaning, even in its heyday never uncontroversial, is less clear today. And the implications of that meaning—where conservatism should go from here—are more up in the air than at any time since the movement's founding in the 1950s.

Conservatism helped to win the Cold War and to discredit socialism, fulfilling two of the modern Right's defining objectives. After such sweeping success, it may seem ungrateful to ask about conservatism's second act. But by its own lights the movement has left vital goals unfulfilled—ending or rolling back or "conservatizing" big government, and restoring America to moral and cultural health. Unlike the defeat of Communism and socialism, goals shared by all conservatives and functioning as the movement's great amalgam and inspiration, shrinking the state and rehabilitating American morals are the favorite causes of different, and to some degree differing, parts of the Right.

Conservatism's slow loss of focus after the Cold War's end was predictable (and often predicted). That the "crack-up" never occurred quite as predicted, however, shows that a broad agreement persists among conservatives. Nonetheless, the bonds between libertarian and social conservatives have weakened. Although 9/11 revealed a new common enemy, the effect was more to change the subject than to forge a new consensus on the Right. After all, the issues that remain—how to limit government again, whether and how government should promote virtue, and more generally, how to

restore the republic along the lines of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—are difficult.

AS A RESULT, REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE TEMPTED, indeed almost compelled, to reinvent conservatism for our times. George W. Bush tried this with "compassionate conservatism." Mike Huckabee has his own blend of faith-based social nostrums and ambitious economic reforms. In fact, he combines the two in a Hail-Mary proposal to replace the income and payroll taxes with a national sales tax. He has less to say about foreign policy or small government. Indeed, he suggests, somewhat in the manner of a European Christian Democrat, that government should apply Christian charity in its programs as a way of correcting the excesses of capitalism and individualism.

Rudy Giuliani seeks to recast conservatism as the concern for limited government (shown notably in his proposals for health care reform) together with a fierce willingness to wage war on terrorism. By almost explicitly excluding religious and moral conservatism from his definition, he comes close to pointing the American Right in the direction of a robust form of libertarianism or old-style European liberalism. But count on his own spirited concern for public morals, prominently displayed when he was mayor of New York, for many detours from such a path.

Mitt Romney aspires, with some success, to be a conservative for all seasons. But his emphasis on his achievements as a businessman and consultant—crunching the numbers with Jack Bauer ruthlessness until they confess their secrets—so ill-fits our wartime situation that it is no wonder that conservatives doubt his seriousness on moral and foreign policy questions. No one wonders about John McCain's seriousness, of course, but many wonder if his noble disdain of self-interested actions (whether campaign contributions or waterboarding) may not go too far in the other direction. Fred Thompson, for all his virtues, seems to want to play Ronald Reagan redux. But the challenges facing the Right occur in a new context and require fresh thinking; and in any event, the sequel is rarely as compelling as the original.

One could go on. The problem is that Republican voters don't recognize any of these trial versions of conservatism as the real deal, a distillation of American principles for our time; and they're right. In the meantime, however, there is a president to nominate and elect.

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CORRESPONDENCE

BIG GOVERNMENT'S INTRACTABILITY

William Voegeli correctly identifies the Right's strategic dilemma: given the welfare state's enduring popularity, should conservatives opt to make their peace with it and seek merely to limit its reach, or should they recommit to a gratifying (if futile) crusade against its legitimacy ("The Trouble with Limited Government," Fall 2007)? Voegeli errs, however, in concluding that "implacable liberals" will simply use any conservative embrace of the New Deal as an occasion to push for an expansion of government. On the contrary, there are plenty of prominent liberals—Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, to name two—who have expressed concern about the future viability of federal entitlement programs.

Voegeli's "Tocquevillian" solution—to means-test entitlements, keeping the welfare state intact only for those who need it—is one that many liberals find attractive. But there are many who *do* need help and aren't getting it—just ask the 47 million Americans who lack health insurance, or the inner-city children who attend dilapidated schools with no textbooks, or the full-time minimum-wage workers who live below

the poverty line. If conservatives were to propose increasing federal assistance to these genuinely needy citizens, they would find many liberals willing—even eager—to curtail entitlement spending for the well-off in exchange.

Unfortunately, that offer was not on the table in the 2005 Social Security debate, which Voegeli cites as his only evidence that liberals will never consent to commonsense entitlement reform. Instead, President Bush asked Democrats to cut Social Security benefits after he had spent four years cutting taxes for the wealthy and stubbornly refusing to help close the gaping holes in the social safety net. In this context, one can hardly blame liberals for refusing to give away one of their few sources of political leverage in exchange for nothing. The welfare state must become both better targeted *and* more robust—in a sense, both more Hayekian and more Rawlsian. Only such a compromise will ensure that government performs its rightful function while avoiding what Voegeli terms the "Swedenization of America."

Josh Patashnik
New Republic
Washington, D.C.

William Voegeli suggests that even though government's share of GDP has barely budged over the decades-long conservative ascendancy, the Right "can't take much solace from fighting Big Government to a draw," given that "the dynamic growth" of America's economy over the same period "offered a great opportunity to reduce the relative size of the public sector." In conservatism's defense, though, it's worth considering what the George Mason University economist Tyler Cowen calls the "libertarian paradox," which holds that as rich countries get richer, the demand for state services—and particularly middle-class entitlements—may naturally rise, rather than fall. "The more wealth we have,"

Cowen notes, "the more government we can afford." A richer country is a less tax-sensitive country, and its inhabitants are more likely to accept the pinch of taxation that comes with, say, outsourcing to the state the cost of their children's day care or their parents' prescription drugs. If Cowen is correct, small-government conservatism's achievement—keeping the federal government's share of GDP constant in a time of steady economic growth—is more impressive than Voegeli allows. In addition, Cowen's thesis implies that the optimal moment for government cutting isn't a long period of economic expansion like the one we've just enjoyed, but a period of stagnation or slight decline, in which people are well-off enough to be suspicious of the welfare state, but not so well-off that they're willing to throw their extra tax dollars after government services. This may be one reason why the small-government movement peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and again in the early 1990s: both were eras of belt-tightening and diminished expectations, and the public reacted to them by expecting less out of government itself. The Cowen hypothesis also offers reason to be a little more optimistic than Voegeli concerning Medicare and Social Security. He calls their projected growth "the Swedenization of America on autopilot," but of course this expansion won't happen on autopilot; it will require enormous tax increases to sustain, which will force voters into hard choices in a way that the long Reagan-to-Clinton boom simply didn't. Voegeli quotes, favorably, Paul Pierson's remark that "if conservatives could design their ideal welfare state, it would consist of nothing but means-tested programs." The crisis of Social Security and Medicare will give conservatives their best chance yet to means-test both programs, by offering the public a choice between means-testing and tax hikes. If voters choose the former (by no means a sure thing, admittedly, given the size and influence of

the Baby Boom cohort), the end result will be a welfare state that's more expensive than today's but that's also much closer to the right-wing understanding of what a welfare state should be. And that would be no small victory.

Ross Douhat
Atlantic Monthly
Washington, D.C.

A conservatism premised in this day and age on the idea that it's possible to roll back the New Deal is a conservatism doomed to box its own shadow. As William Voegeli writes, committed conservatives can "deserve" to win, but they'll be playing a different game from the other 90% of the country—which, in a democracy, is a losing strategy.

Unfortunately, the most promising alternative strategy offered so far, the so-called Ownership Society, has proved a spectacular failure under President Bush. Whether this represents the failure of an idea or an administration is open for debate. My own view is that we cannot rule out the Bush circle's unique incompetence.

The good news is that the New Deal was the product of a passing age, the Industrial Age, and we may have more room than we realize to shape what takes its place in the next century. Because Republicans are likely to hold very few elective offices come January 2009, we'll have plenty of time to hash out just these sorts of strategy questions. Maybe it will be nice to play defense again. In the past, it's been as close as we've come to a good offense.

Ryan Sager
Brooklyn, NY

Reading William Voegeli's cogent essay is a depressing experience for an advocate of limited government. Government has grown steadily, as he notes, not just in size but in

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scope. From prescription drugs for the elderly to faith-based social service grants, the federal government now routinely launches programs that even Franklin Roosevelt didn't dream of. And despite all the talk by conservatives and libertarians about "winning the intellectual battle," the fact is that conservatives have not rolled back any significant part of the welfare state. Indeed, a Republican Party in complete control of the national government in 2003 delivered the biggest expansion of entitlements since Lyndon Johnson.

Political movements need a vision. American conservatism at its best does have a vision—a vision of individual freedom and a limited government, especially a limited federal government, a vision rooted in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and in the individualist bones of a people who abandoned statist Europe and forged a libertarian revolution.

Ronald Reagan helped to revive that vision, though as Voegeli notes, he was more effective at rhetoric than at actually rolling back government. Since Reagan, or perhaps since the middle of 1981, Republicans have slid back to acquiescence in the New Deal and the Great Society. Or to something worse: being embarrassed by their own ideas. Lacking a positive vision, they are inarticulate in defending free enterprise and limited government and find themselves conceding the other side's case. Lacking a consistent philosophy, they stumble into intellectually indefensible contradictions: welfare cuts and business subsidies, federalism and a national marriage law. Lacking faith in the American idea of limited government and in their fellow Americans, they try to win elections by declaring their opponents traitors in a permanent war.

The supply-siders promised that tax cuts would save conservatives from the necessity of taking on the difficult subject of excessive spending. And a generation of conservatives forgot how to argue against federal programs on constitutional and economic grounds. I think Voegeli is wrong when he writes, "The experience of a quarter century shows that tax cuts have served important purposes, but

the cause of scaling back Big Government is not one of them." Wouldn't the federal government be spending more today if Reagan hadn't slashed tax rates? The "starve the beast" theory hasn't been the panacea some of us would have liked. But government can't spend more than it can raise—even though it has discovered that it can raise more through borrowing than it used to think possible. European governments spend more than the U.S. government partly because of a different political culture and partly because they have a Value-Added Tax. Repeal the VAT over there, repeal withholding here, and you'd see government getting smaller. And the coming tsunami of entitlement spending may yet force a confrontation that anti-taxers can win. But it would be easier if conservative leaders had been pressing the case against the dole for the past generation.

Where there is no vision, the people perish—or at least the party and its principles. The first task for advocates of limited government is to develop and advance that vision. The founders, the abolitionists, the free-traders, the Progressives, and the Reaganites all honed and advocated their ideas long before they saw political victory. And we must translate that vision into policy proposals, organizations, and political movements. As John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, advocates of liberty and limited government must make ready the ideas, the platform, the networks that could serve a political leader who wanted to take on the task of clearing away the late 20th century's accumulated burden of bureaucracy, unfunded liabilities, overextended military commitments, and usurpations of the responsibilities of free citizens.

David Boaz
Executive Vice President
Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

William Voegeli invites conservatives "to acknowledge and understand" that their attempt to "scale back the welfare state" has been a "stunning defeat," but although he sometimes seems to glimpse that failure's explanation, he never identifies it.

The advocates of welfare state programs present their coercive measures, whether Social Security or Medicare, as the moral thing to do and conservatives have no counter, because they agree. This is the reason why so many conservatives, as Voegeli notes, accept the welfare state, merely haggling over whether it's being run "efficiently."

The actual choice conservatives (and all of us) face is the choice Ayn Rand presented years ago: egoism and freedom, or altruism and tyranny. America's Founding Fathers broke with political tradition; but their magnificent creation could not endure, because they did not break with moral tradition. The altruism of Christ, Kant, Mill, and Marx is in fact incompatible with individual rights.

Anyone who today wishes to fight for the individual and against the welfare state must demonstrate the Founding Fathers' courage, but this time in the moral realm. We must propound a new morality of rational self-interest.

Yaron Brook, Ph.D.
President and Executive Director
Ayn Rand Institute
Irvine, CA

William Voegeli replies:

I appreciate the careful attention these readers paid to my article—secondarily because it is gratifying to have one's work read thoughtfully, but primarily because the argument over the future of the welfare state deserves our best thinking.

Josh Patashnik, Ross Douthat, and Ryan Sager speak of the possibility of resolving the argument over the welfare state within the confines of public opinion as it now exists and is likely to evolve in the foreseeable future. All three think that Irving Kristol's "conservative welfare state"—or at any rate a welfare state better reflecting conservative concerns—is attainable and desirable. David Boaz and Yaron Brook speak of the impossibility of reaching an acceptable compromise over the welfare state within the confines of existing public opinion, and urge opponents of the welfare state to concentrate on the

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long-term goal of radically reshaping the public's thinking. Both treat the idea of a conservative welfare state as not only a contradiction in terms, but a Trojan horse: the welfare state is going to change conservatism for the worse, much more than conservatism will ever change the welfare state for the better.

I am not enchanted by the distant shores to which Boaz would have us row, and the even wilder ones beyond them that call out to Dr. Brook. Aristotle taught that man is a political animal because nature intended human beings to be friends. The followers of Ayn Rand, however, scorn the idea that communal life—among fellows who regard one another as more than mere competitors—is essential to happiness and well-being, a sensibility widely shared by primates who aren't objectivists.

As for libertarians, the terms on which they want political entities in general, and the United States in particular, to cohere and endure are unlikely to be up to the job. Most libertarians didn't like the Moral Majority, which is fine, but their indifference to America's need for a moral majority isn't. Among the many things Woodstock Nation will do badly is being a nation. Similarly, most libertarians don't wish to belong to the Committee on the Present Danger, which is also fine. Their doctrinal determination to interpret every threat to the nation's security as neither present nor particularly dangerous, however, is not fine.

As the objectivist and libertarian positions pertain to the welfare state, my concerns are less substantive than strategic. Mr. Boaz says rightly that most successful political movements endure long, bitter years in the wilderness before conquering the citadels of power. Not every story is a success story, however. Just because you hear voices doesn't mean you're John the Baptist. Most causes never leave the wilderness; others are banished there, after years of being politically consequential, and never return. The Prohibition Party is still in business, for example. Its 2004 platform calls for "leadership, legislation, and education...[that] will result in a change in societal attitudes toward supporting prohi-

bition of the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcoholic beverage products."

The libertarians' cause is less quixotic than the prohibitionists', but the dangers are similar. If your goal is a radical change in "societal attitudes" or to "develop and advance" a sweeping vision, it's hard to know when the project of transforming the world must yield to the less romantic business of accommodating it. Worse, it becomes tempting to equate realism with cynicism, and irrelevance with integrity. Power corrupts, but so does powerlessness. Boaz's "vision of individual freedom and a limited government, especially a limited federal government, a vision rooted in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution" is more than congenial to me, though he and I would disagree on some particulars of what America's founders envisioned. But if conservatives bet all their chips on realizing that vision, and disdain every compromise with the welfare state as a betrayal of their highest goal, they run the risk that their only tangible accomplishment will be their own marginalization.

The question is whether *any* attainable outcome in the fight over the welfare state will be one conservatives can plausibly regard as an improvement, rather than a capitulation. Ross Douthat and Ryan Sager both incline toward a hope similar to my own, which is for a simpler, less baroque welfare state, one that helps the poor while giving everyone else incentives to stay unpoor and, thus, ineligible for government programs. Douthat is a little more optimistic than Sager about achieving such a resolution, but neither makes it sound like a walk in the park.

Mr. Patashnik's letter suggests, inadvertently, why a grand compromise over the welfare state, a "win-win" deal for both liberals and conservatives, will be so elusive. He envisions a welfare state "both better targeted *and* more robust." The conservatives yield to the more robust part to get the targeting, and vice-versa for the liberals. There will, of course, be lots of devils in lots of details. Patashnik, for example, treats the case of "inner-city children who

attend dilapidated schools with no textbooks" as an instance where the welfare state is insufficiently robust. Conservatives, looking at well-funded but failing urban public school systems, will call for better targeting, not to mention curbing teacher's unions and giving parents the right to educate their children outside the public system without forfeiting every dollar of public support.

More generally, Patashnik's insistence that there are lots of liberals concerned about the entitlement programs, and amenable to a grand bargain with conservatives that includes recasting them, is attractive without being persuasive. Bill Clinton did indeed express "concern about the future viability of federal entitlement programs." He spoke in February 1998 of a "looming crisis in Social Security."

It's difficult for conservatives to believe that liberals are ready to negotiate seriously over the issue, however, when a politician as persuasive as Clinton can't even persuade his wife on the question. (Granted, she has her own reasons to be skeptical about his declarations.) When Barack Obama recently took a position like President Clinton's, that Social Security was a serious problem calling for immediate action, Hillary Clinton disputed the need for any measure more drastic than a bipartisan commission, one which will certainly come up with much better solutions than the 78 bipartisan commissions that have studied Social Security in the past two decades.

Senator Clinton is not alone in denying the dire state of Social Security's finances. While President Clinton urged Congress, in his 1998 State of the Union message, to "Save Social Security first," the consensus liberal position going into the 2008 election is, "Mention Social Security last." Patashnik has had no more success persuading his *New Republic* colleague, Jonathan Chait, to consider entitlement reform than Bill Clinton has had with Hillary. We'll have to "hike up taxes or trim spending a bit" in 2042, Chait says, but in the meanwhile we should ignore the "entitlement hysterics" and treat Social Security's finances as "the perfect example of a problem that will solve

itself in time." This is the sort of argument I had in mind when I called liberals "implacable." Patashnik will make it easier for me to reverse that call if he walks down the hall and changes Chait's mind.

RAWLS AND ISLAMOFASCISM

While I am most grateful for Bradley Watson's generous remarks about my book *Illiberal Justice: John Rawls vs. the American Political Tradition*, there is one issue he raises on which some clarification is in order. Watson scolds me for "overreach[ing]" when I argue that Rawls's war on what he regards as the "arbitrariness" of the world was animated by the same sort of fanatical spirit that motivates today's radical Islamists and the partisans of secular totalitarian ideologies. That judgment on my part will appear less unreasonable, I think, in light of two remarks by Rawls that I cite. First, in the last paragraph of his 1996 introduction to the paperback edition of *Political Liberalism*, he asserts, "if a reasonably just society that subordinates power to its aims is not possible and people are largely amoral, if not incurably cynical and self-centered, one might ask with Kant whether it is worthwhile for human beings to live on the earth." Rawls repeats that suggestion in *The Law of Peoples*, published two years later, with reference to the actualization of his proposals for a just international order, or "Society of Peoples." In other words, he invited readers to conclude that, unless something like his abstract model of a just society, along with his only slightly less utopian vision of a new world order, was achieved, it would be just as well if human life disappeared.

Unlike Kant, who questioned whether human life was justifiable if justice in its elemental sense, i.e., the protection of the innocent and the infliction of merited punishment on criminals, were abandoned, Rawls espoused a far more stringent (as well as, I argue, incoherent) set of standards for legitimizing our existence. He also excused unjust behavior on the part of individuals living in our

present world by reference to what he called "the often squalid behavior of others" as well as "the injustice of [existing] institutions." (*Theory of Justice*, second edition). Disheartened by America's failure to adopt such policies as universal government-provided health insurance and full public financing of political campaigns, Rawls further judged that the contemporary United States may be no more democratic than "Germany between 1870 and 1945," i.e., including the Nazi period (*Justice As Fairness*), and described our government as only an "allegedly constitutional democratic regime" (*The Law of Peoples*, emphasis added).

Given the ungrateful and even misanthropic character of these judgments, as well as the apocalyptic tone of those I quoted first, it is not surprising that Rawls spent his last years, according to some of his disciples, in a state of bitterness at the world. That bitterness and misanthropy, I argue, were the ultimate consequence of his determination to remake the world to conform to his "intuitions," lest it prove unredeemable. I do not think it farfetched to associate with the spirit of Islamofascism Rawls's outlook that calls into question the desirability of the human race's survival unless the very conditions of our existence are radically transformed.

David Lewis Schaefer
Holy Cross College
Worcester, MA

Bradley C.S. Watson replies:

So insightful is David Schaefer, he instructs even as he overreaches. The passages he cites in response to me, while thought-provoking, do not establish that Rawls was animated by the kind of fanatical spirit that motivates radical Islamists. They do reveal Rawls to be an impatient, tendentious progressive. In this, he was in company with the vast number of American intellectuals who, starting in the late 19th century, sought to establish the very sort of administrative despotism that Tocqueville so sagaciously foresaw and warned against. Despite occasional rhetorical flourishes, Rawls was animated overwhelmingly by this vision—a secular, materialist, egalitarian one deeply at odds with Islamists' thumotic religious fervor. But I agree with Schaefer that Rawls's incoherence on ultimate questions opens him to many uses, not all of them as reliably liberal as he might have liked. Schaefer himself recognizes this fact when he wonders in his book "whether Rawls considered the implications of his rhetoric with the seriousness that some readers he influences may do." And I also agree with Schaefer's argument that Rawlsian neutralist liberalism leads to a kind of "unilateral moral disarmament" in the face of the Islamist threat. But these are very different sorts of claims than ones that would condemn, or credit, the late Harvard professor for possessing genuine thumos.

SOCRATIC IRONY

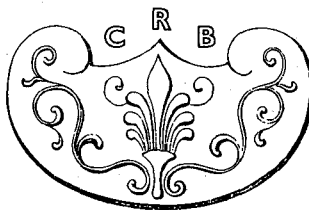
I was pleased to see Christopher Nadon's recent review of two translations of Plato's *Republic* ("Back to the Cave," Fall 2007). His observation on mine that the footnotes occasionally strike a false note is no doubt correct, but the particular note he objects to can hardly be omitted from any properly harmonized assessment of Socrates' irony. In calling it gracious, I was alluding to Aristotle's remarks in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1127b 22-31), in which his opinion is clearly that Socrates hits the right note with his irony, and reveals a graciousness of character that is more than a matter of polite appearances. Socrates is proud, but he is also humble, and irony is the mode of speech that captures both. In the *Posterior Analytics* (97b 14-26) Aristotle distinguishes Socrates' pride from the garden variety that demands honor and is angered by insults; Socrates has a great soul, Aristotle says, because he is above caring about good or bad fortune. It is only in connection with Socrates' conception of philosophy that one can hope to understand his characteristic blend of humility and pride. I address that connection in my introduction to the *Republic*. The ultimate specimen of Socratic irony is his proclamation that he knows he knows nothing. The hearer or reader who can make sense of that claim has discovered the difference between

knowledge and opinion, and is capable of hearing an invitation to philosophy. In the *Republic*, even Thrasymachus, whose entry into the dialogue (336c-d) is ferociously antagonistic to Socrates and to philosophy, is not immune to such an invitation. When Socrates later says they have become friends (498d), that is not ironic speech to veil hostility under a cloak of polite appearances but an accurate recognition of an ironic fact. Thrasymachus for once forgot his pride and rivalries and got interested in trying to understand something. Socrates is certainly not a proponent of universal enlightenment, but in the dialogues he succeeds in getting a little torchlight into some unlikely places.

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Christopher Nadon replies:

I regret that I missed Professor Sach's allusions to Aristotle's treatment of Socratic irony. But even in their light a problem remains: pride expressed ironically remains altogether pride, but not so humility. Thus in the passages mentioned, Aristotle calls Socrates "gracious" and "great souled," but not humble. As any serious drinker will tell you, certain virtues, like good scotch, are better left unblended.



IN WAR: RESOLUTION

Essay by Victor Davis Hanson

“IRAQ,” SWEARS AL GORE, “WAS THE SINGLE worst strategic mistake in American history.” Senate Majority leader Harry Reid agrees that the war he voted to authorize is “the worst foreign policy mistake in U.S. history,” and indeed is already “lost.” Many of our historically minded politicians and commanders have weighed in with similar superlatives. Retired General William Odom calls Iraq “the greatest strategic disaster in United States history.” Senator Chuck Hagel (who voted for the war) is somewhat more cautious; he terms Iraq “the most dangerous foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam.” Jimmy Carter takes, as usual, the loftiest view: the Iraq War, and Great Britain’s acquiescence in it, constitute “a major tragedy for the world,” and prove that the Bush Administration “has been the worst in history.”

Certainly there are legitimate questions about Iraq, as about all wars. Why, for example, did Tommy Franks, the Centcom commander who led American forces in a brilliant three-week victory over Saddam Hussein, abruptly announce his retirement in late May 2003—prompting a disruption in command just as the successful conventional war ended and an unexpected insurgency in Iraq gathered steam? Why were looters allowed to ransack much of Baghdad’s infrastructure following the defeat of the Baathist army? Why “disband” the Iraqi military and purge its officer corps of Baathists at precisely the time law and order—not tens of thousands of unemployed youth—were needed? And weren’t there too few occupying troops in the war’s aftermath, along

with too restrictive rules of engagement—but too prominent a profile for the American proconsuls busily dictating to the Iraqis?

The queries don’t stop there, alas. Why in advance weren’t there sufficient new-model body armor and armored Humvees to protect American troops? Why did we begin to assault Fallujah in April 2004, only to pull back for six months and then have to retake the city after the American election in November? Why were the country’s borders left open to infiltrators and its ubiquitous ammunition dumps kept accessible to terrorists? The catalogue of military error could be multiplied *ad nauseam*. Then there are also the inevitable strategic conundrums over the need to attack Saddam’s regime in the first place, given the nature of the terrorist threat, the ascendant Iranian theocracy next door, and the colossal intelligence failures concerning imagined vast depots of chemical and biological weapons.

But what is missing from the national debate over the “worst” war in our history is any appreciation of past American military errors—political, strategic, technological, intelligence, tactical—that nearly cost us victory in far more important conflicts. Nor do we accept the savage irony of war that only through errors, tragic though they may be, do successful armies adjust in time to discover winning strategies, tactics, and generals.

Preoccupied with the daily news from Baghdad, we seem to think our generation is unique in experiencing the heartbreak of an error-plagued war. We forget that victory in every war goes to the side that commits fewer mistakes—and learns

more from them in less time—not to the side that makes no mistakes. A perfect military in a flawless war never existed—though after Grenada and the air war over the Balkans we apparently thought otherwise. Rather than sink into unending re-creation over Iraq, we should reflect about comparable blunders in America’s past wars and how they were corrected. Without such historical knowledge we are condemned to remain shrill captives of the present.

Intelligence Failures

TAKE ONE OF THIS WAR’S MOST CONTROVERSIAL issues, intelligence failures. Supposedly we went to war in 2003 with little accurate information about either Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or its endemic religious factionalism. As a result the U.S. government lost credibility and goodwill at home and abroad, and is now plagued by enormous political and military problems in trying to stabilize a constitutional government in Iraq. Have lapses of this magnitude been unusual in past wars?

Not at all, in either a strategic or tactical context. American intelligence officers missed the almost self-evident Pearl Harbor attack, as an entire Japanese carrier group steamed unnoticed to within a few hundred miles of Hawaii. After fighting for four long years we were completely surprised by the Soviets’ efforts to absorb Eastern Europe. Almost no one had a clue about the Communist invasion of South Korea in June 1950—or the subsequent Chinese entrance *en*

masse into North Korea months later. Neither the CIA nor the State Department had much inkling that Saddam Hussein would gobble up Kuwait in August 1990.

We should remember that long before the WMD controversy, the triggers for American wars have usually been odd affairs, characterized by poor intelligence gathering and inept diplomacy—and thus endless controversy and conspiracy mongering: for example, the so-called Thornton affair that started the Mexican War; the defense and shelling of Fort Sumter; the cry of “Remember the Maine!” that heralded the Spanish-American War; the murky circumstances surrounding the 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania* that turned public opinion against the Kaiser; the Pearl Harbor debacle; an offhand remark in January 1950 by Secretary of State Dean Acheson that South Korea was outside our “defense perimeter”; the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution; and an American diplomat’s apparent signal of unconcern to Saddam Hussein immediately before he invaded Kuwait.

At the battlefield level, America’s intelligence failures are even more shocking. On April 6, 1862, Union forces at Shiloh allowed a large, noisy Confederate army under General Albert Sidney Johnston to approach unnoticed (by both Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman) to within a few thousand yards of their front with disastrous results. Grant—still clueless as to the forces arrayed against him—compounded his error by sending an ambiguous message for reinforcements to General Lew Wallace, resulting in a critical delay of aid for several hours. Hundreds of Union soldiers died in the meantime. Following the battle Union generals knew even less concerning the whereabouts of the retreating, defeated Confederate forces and thus allowed them to escape in safety. The hard-won Union victory became an object of blame-gaming for the remainder of the 19th century.

Perhaps the two costliest intelligence lapses of World War II preceded the Battle of the Bulge and Okinawa—both towards the end of the war, after radical improvements in intelligence methods and technology. Americans had no idea of the scope, timing, or aims of the massive German surprise attack through the Ardennes in December 1944, despite the battle-tested acumen of our two most respected generals, Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley, and British and American intercepts of Wehrmacht messages. At Okinawa, American intelligence officers grievously underestimated the size, position, and nature of the Japanese deployment, and thus vastly overestimated the efficacy of their own pre-invasion bombing attacks. Yet Okinawa was not our first experience with island-hopping. It unfolded as the last invasion assault in the Pacific theater of operations—supposedly after the collective wisdom gleaned from Guadalcanal, the Marianas, Peleilu, the Philippines,

Tarawa, and Iwo Jima had been well digested. Yet this late in the war, over 140,000 Americans were killed, wounded, or missing in the Ardennes and on Okinawa.

Strategic and Tactical Errors

AT THE GEOSTRATEGIC LEVEL, AMERICAN diplomats have had to make devil’s bargains far more morally suspect than going into Iraq. General George Patton and others lamented that World War II had broken out over saving the free peoples of Eastern Europe—only to end with the Yalta accords ensuring their enslavement by an erstwhile American ally whose military we had supplied lavishly. Today we worry whether the U.S. should have armed some jihadists in Afghanistan in the 1980s or whether it was moral to watch with glee as Iran and Iraq nearly annihilated one another—each occasionally helped by U.S. arms or intelligence. We forget that even worse choices than these have confronted us in the past—like sending billions of dollars of aid to Joseph Stalin, just a few years after he had slaughtered or starved to death 20 million Soviets.

In many of our wars this country has committed strategic mistakes far greater in number and toll than anything seen in Iraq. Perhaps the worst was to commit thousands of American crewmen to daylight bombing raids over occupied Europe in 1942–43. Prewar dogmas of the “bomber always gets through” blinded the proponents of air power. Ignoring its critics, the Army Air Corps sent hundreds of highly trained crews to their deaths on slow, unescorted bombing runs in broad daylight, amid thousands of German flak batteries and Luftwaffe fighters—and achieved very little in return until early 1944. Even more inexplicable was Admiral Ernest King’s decision in 1942 not to use American destroyers and destroyer-escorts to shepherd merchant ships across the Atlantic to Great Britain. German U-boats had a field day, torpedoing slow-moving cargo vessels right off our east coast—which was lit up each night, as though to silhouette undefended American targets at sea. King persisted despite ample evidence from World War I that the convoy system had worked, and despite pleas from veteran British officers that their own two-year experience in the war had taught them the folly of sending unescorted merchant ships across the Atlantic.

We often read of the tragedy of the September 1944 Arnheim campaign. Impossible logistics, bad weather, lousy intelligence, tactical imbecility, and much more doomed the “Market Garden” operation and led to the infamous “A Bridge Too Far” catastrophe. Thousands of Anglo-American troops were needlessly killed or wounded—after the Allies had recently crushed an entire German army group in the west (though they let 100,000

Wehrmacht troops escape at Falaise). The foolery of Market Garden also ate up scarce resources, manpower, and gasoline at precisely the time the American Third Army was nearing the Rhine without much major opposition. Once Allied armies stalled for want of supplies, they would be unable to cross the border of the Reich for another half year. The Germans used the breathing space after their victory in Holland to rush defenders to the so-called Siegfried Line, which had been theretofore mostly undefended.

Had General Douglas MacArthur in late 1950 listened to both superiors and subordinates, he would not have sent thousands of G.I.s with long vulnerable supply lines into the far reaches of wintry North Korea—on his gut instinct that hundreds of thousands of Chinese “volunteers” would not cross the Yalu River and his troops would be “home for Christmas.” When Mao ordered the massive People’s Army to invade, the longest retreat in the history of U.S. forces ensued, with thousands of American casualties.

Our tactical decisions have remained even more error-prone. Grant was still sending ranks of soldiers against entrenched Confederate positions for most of summer 1864, despite Sherman’s angry protests against the folly of such assaults in a rapidly changing war of massed firepower. In World War I, despite our assurances that our well-trained riflemen could broach enemy positions, seasoned British and French commanders warned novice American planners of the lethality of German rapid-firing artillery, machine guns, and poison gas. Americans died in droves before we got it right by early 1918. For all its surprises and mistakes D-Day was carefully planned and a brilliant success; its immediate aftermath was a near disaster. Within a week of the landings, Allied army groups stalled in the hedgerows for over six weeks—we suffered tens of thousands of casualties while Americans were flummoxed by entrenched, camouflaged German positions amid the narrow lanes and thick hedges. Apparently no planner had thought much about the terrain or navigability of the *bocage*—although Normandy was a well-traveled area and should have been familiar to American officers, many of them veterans of the fighting in France during World War I.

Outgunned

HOW ABOUT WEAPONS PARITY? AMERICA has a reputation for technological prowess and machine-mastery. The phone and electric light bulb were singular American innovations; the Wright Brothers invented the airplane; Richard Gatling the first modern successful machine gun. Nevertheless in nearly every one of our major wars American troops initially entered combat with arms vastly inferior to their more

experienced enemies. In this regard Vietnam, the 1991 Gulf War, and the present Middle East conflicts are exceptional; these were our first major land engagements in which American weaponry has been at the outset superior in almost every category. We sent a million troops to Europe between 1917 and 1918 with weapons qualitatively inferior to both our German enemies and French and British allies. We had no tanks—and would never produce our own in any numbers until the war was well over. We relied for the most part on British- or French-designed machine guns and artillery. European airplanes were far better than American Dayton-Wright and Curtiss models. Only the American model M1903 Springfield rifle, and later the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), proved fit for the rapidly changing technological conditions of the Western Front.

Our ill-preparedness was in some sense still worse in both World War II and Korea. The United States went to war in 1941 equipped with far fewer aircraft carriers in the Pacific theater than the Japanese. Our Wildcat front-line fighters were inferior to the Japanese Zero; obsolete Brewster F2A Buffalo were rightly known as “flying coffins.” The Douglas TBD Devastator bomber was a death-trap, its pilots essentially wiped out at the Battle of Midway trying to drop often unreliable torpedoes. American-designed Lee, Grant, and Stuart tanks—and even the much-heralded Shermans (“Ronson Lighters”)—were intrinsically inferior to most contemporary German models, which had far better armor and armament. With the exception of the superb M-1 rifle, it is hard to rank any American weapons system as comparable to those used by the Wehrmacht, at least until 1944–45. We never developed guns quite comparable to the fast-firing, lethal German .88 artillery platform. Our anti-tank weapons of all calibers remained substandard. Most of our machine guns and mortars were reliable—but of World War I vintage. The American military learned immediately in Korea that our first-generation jet fighters—F-80 Shooting Stars—could not match Russian MiG-15s. Even improved Sherman tanks and newer M-24 Chaffee light tanks through much of 1950 were outclassed by World War II-vintage Russian T-34s and T-85s.

Poor Leadership

HAVE THERE EVER BEEN LAPSES IN MILITARY leadership like the ones that purportedly mar our Iraq effort? The so-called “Revolt of the Generals” against Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was nothing compared to the “Revolt of the Admirals” that led to Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson’s forced resignation in the midst of the bitter first year of the Korean War. Johnson himself had come to office following the removal (or resignation), and then probable suicide, of Secretary James Forrestal, whose last note included a lengthy quotation from Sophocles’ *Ajax*. Johnson’s successor, the venerable General George Marshall, lasted less than a



year—hounded out by Joseph McCarthy, and an object of furor in the wartime 1952 election that brought in Eisenhower (who did not defend his former superior from McCarthy’s slanders). The result was that four different secretaries of defense—Forrestal, Johnson, Marshall, and Robert Lovett—served between 1949 and 1951.

Critics of the Iraq war wonder how a workmanlike Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, on whose watch Abu Ghraib occurred, had obtained command of all coalition ground forces in the first place, and later why General George Casey persisted in tactics that were aimed more at downsizing our forces than going after the enemy and fighting a vigorous war of counterinsurgency. But surely these armchair critics can acknowledge that such controversies over personnel pale in comparison to past storms. Lincoln serially fired, ignored, or bypassed mediocrities like Generals Burnside, Halleck, Hooker, McClellan, McDowell, Meade, Pope, and Rosecrans before finding Grant, George Thomas, Sherman, and Philip Sheridan—all of whom at one time or another were under severe criticism and nearly dismissed.

World War II was little better. By all accounts General John C.H. Lee set up an enormous logistical fiefdom in Paris that thrived on perks and privilege while American armies at the front were short on manpower, materials, and fuel. To this day military historians cannot quite fathom how and why Major General Lloyd Fredendall was ever given an entire corps in the North Africa campaign. His uninspired generalship led to the disaster at the Kasserine Pass and his own immediate removal. Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, a competent officer, was bewildered by the unexpected Japanese resistance on Okinawa, and unimaginatively plowed head-on through fortified enemy positions—until killed in action on the island, the most senior-ranking officer to die by enemy fire in World War II. The generalship of Mark Clark in Italy was often disastrous.

The story of the U.S. army at war is one of sacking, sidetracking, or ostracizing its highest and best-known commanders in the field—Grant after Shiloh, Douglas MacArthur in Korea, Patton in Sicily, or William Westmoreland in Vietnam—for both good and bad reasons. Iraq and Afghanistan are peculiar in that there have been so few personnel changes, much less a general consensus about perceived military incompetence. In comparison to past conflicts, the wonder is not that a gifted officer like David Petraeus came into real prominence relatively late in the present war, but that his unique talents were recognized quickly enough to allow him the command and latitude to alter the entire tactical approach to the war in Iraq.

Live and Learn, Learn and Live

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE wartime blunders and controversies that together cost hundreds of thousands of American lives but usually did not endanger eventual victories? First, remember that such failings usually were aired in a long tradition of investigative, hard-hitting exposés and columns. Long before Seymour Hersh and Peter Arnett, Thomas Knox, Edward Crapsey, Drew Pearson, and Walter Winchell wrote scathing critiques of American military performance. In reaction, the most vehement attack on the wartime press came not from

Richard Nixon, but from William Tecumseh Sherman. "If I had my choice I would kill every reporter in the world," he sighed, "but I am sure we would be getting reports from hell before breakfast."

Yet until the defeat in Vietnam, there was a sort of tragic acceptance of military error as inherent in war. Ours was once a largely rural population, inured to natural disaster and resigned to human shortcoming. Though Presidents Lincoln and Truman were both reviled, Americans still felt that ultimately the American system of transparency and self-criticism would correct wartime mistakes. Fault-finding and partisan grandstanding there were aplenty, but the common desire for victory usually overcame perpetual finger-pointing and serial despair. Pearl Harbor and its attendant conspiracy theories may have set the Greatest Generation back, but such losses, humiliation, and suspicion were hardly considered tantamount to American defeat.

So we plowed on, accepting that in war choices are typically between the bad and worse. It was foolhardy not to escort convoys in early World War II; but Admiral King—always suspicious of British motives—erred because he believed that such a commitment would divert precious assets from the Pacific War, where the U.S., largely alone, had to face the Japanese fleet—far larger and more formidable than Hitler's. The Sherman tank trapped and incinerated thousands of Americans when torched by Panthers and Tigers. But Patton himself saw that its dependability, speed, and sheer numbers offered countervailing advantages in racing toward the Rhine.

By the same token, for every purported blunder in Iraq, there is at least an understandable reason why errors occurred in the context of human imperfection, emotion, and fear. Such considerations do not mitigate the enormity of military mistakes, but they should foster understanding of how and why they occur. Such recognition might lend humility to critics and wisdom to the perpetrators—and prepare us to accept and deal with similar human fallibility in the future. So shoot looters—and CNN immediately would have libeled the occupation forces as recycled Saddamites. Level Fallujah—and Iraqis would have compared us to the Soviets in Afghanistan. Had we kept together the Republican Guard—if that were even possible—charges of perpetuating the agents of Saddam's genocidal regime would have followed, with unfavorable contrasts to our successful de-Nazification program after World War II. Granted, there were not enough American troops to close borders, monitor ammunition depots, and maintain order. But as a result, there were enough deployed elsewhere to discourage trouble in the Korean peninsula, reassure Europe and Japan of our material commitment to their security, fight the Taliban in Afghanistan, help keep order in the Balkans, and man dozens of bases worldwide.

When MiG-15s surprisingly proved superior to American F-80s, our Korean War planners took a pass on blaming each other and instead deployed with blinding speed the superb F-86 Sabrejet, which surpassed its Russian counterparts. Once a General Hooker or Fredendall was found incompetent, Americans expected that someone like Grant or Patton would eventually step forward from a formerly peacetime army; a General Sherman or General Petraeus doesn't emerge on the first day of a war. Only the lethal experience during 1942 and 1943 in the skies above Germany ensured that improved bombers, tactics, and escort fighters would arise to devastate the Third Reich by late 1944 and 1945, forcing the Germans to divert untold resources to counter the American air assault. We are relieved that recent emphasis on counterinsurgency under General Petraeus has brought radical improvement in Iraq in a way that previous counterterrorism tactics did not—but much of our current wisdom nevertheless accrued from the hard years of fighting between 2003 and 2006 when Americans severely weakened both al-Qaeda and the Sunni insurgents. Again, what loses wars are not the inevitable mistakes, but the failure to correct them in time and the defeatism and depression (because errors occurred at all) that we allow to paralyze us.

The quagmire in the hedgerows led to thousands of American deaths, but also to innovations and new tactics, whether specially equipped "Rhino" Sherman tanks or B-17s used tactically to blow holes in the German lines (and kill and wound hundreds of Americans in "friendly fire" blunders). Likewise, we may have started in Iraq with the naïve belief that thin-skinned Humvees were simply updated Jeeps good enough to transport personnel behind the lines. But we quickly learned that in a war with no lines they became underarmored coffins—prompting a challenge and response cycle between the enemy's Improvised Explosive Devices and our armor. Frenzied development efforts produced up-armored kits, factory-designed models with superior protection, and entirely new vehicles like the Strykers, MRAPs (mine resistant, ambush protected), and Rhinos.

The Home Front

THE HOME FRONT ONCE ACCEPTED THAT our adversaries faced the same obstacles and challenges of war. Moreover Americans assumed that the enemy, being less introspective and self-critical, was even more prone to military error than we—and less likely to innovate and correct. That confidence ensured that the public saw mistakes not just in absolute but also in relative terms. World War I saw one million ill-equipped Doughboys deployed against the most experienced and deadly modern army the world

had yet seen. But the mass drafting of one million soldiers, equipped and sent across the Atlantic in a mere year, was acknowledged on all sides as a feat even beyond the ability of the Kaiser's general staff. In World War II, lapses in our convoy system were hardly as damaging to us as Germany's repeated mistakes at sea were to the Nazi cause—faulty torpedoes, poor air support for submarine operations, and abject security breaches that lent the Allies almost instantaneous knowledge of the Kriegsmarine's operations. There is no need to document the stupendous strategic and tactical blunders that led to Saddam's ignominious defeat. But in his wake (and after his demise), the supposedly sophisticated jihadists have made just as many mistakes. In a self-proclaimed war of Islamic liberation, al-Qaeda in Iraq has mutilated, butchered, and terrorized a once largely sympathetic population. As a result they have nearly pulled off the impossible: a formerly receptive Sunni tribal community has turned against Sunni Muslim jihadists, and joined with American infidels, sometimes alongside the troops of a Shiite-led government.

In past wars there was recognition of factors beyond human control—the weather; the fickleness of human nature; the role of chance, the irrational, and the inexplicable—that lent a humility to our efforts and tolerance for unintended consequences. "Wars begin when you will," Machiavelli reminds us, "but they do not end when you please." The star-crossed and disastrous Dieppe raid of August 1942 did not mean that D-Day two years later had to fail. When in March 1945 maverick General Curtis LeMay sent high-altitude precision B-29 bombers carrying napalm in low over Tokyo, with little if any armament, the expected American bloodbath did not follow—thanks to a ferocious jet stream and dark nights that meant the huge planes came in much faster and with better cover. "To a good general," wrote the Roman historian Livy, "luck is important." By contrast the American media went into near hysterics during the so-called "pause" in the three-week victory over Saddam, when an unforeseen sandstorm temporarily stalled our advance. Only later was it revealed that air operations with precision weapons had continued all along to decimate Saddam's static forces.

WMDs were not found in Iraq, it is true. Yet an earlier American generation might have consoled itself with the notion that at last we had proved (as previous intelligence had not) that Saddam no longer posed a threat, and ensured that Iraq would not again translate oil wealth into the deadly forces with which it had attacked four of its neighbors. Our ancestors might have added that the war had effectively raised our standard of proof from "We must prove that you *have* WMDs" to "You must prove that you *don't*." Libya, for example, had more WMDs than Saddam did—and may well have given them up to avoid the latter's fate.

Has War Changed, or Have We?

VICTORY DOES NOT REQUIRE ACHIEVING ALL of your objectives, but achieving more of yours than your enemy does of his. Patient Northerners realized almost too late that victory required not merely warding off or defeating Confederate armies, but also invading and occupying an area as large as Western Europe in order to render an entire people incapable of waging war. Blunders were seen as inevitable once an unarmed U.S. decided to fight Germany, Italy, and Japan all at once in a war to be conducted far away across wide oceans, against enemies that had a long head start in rearmament. We had disastrous intelligence failures in World War II, but we also broke most of the German and Japanese codes in a fashion our enemies could neither fathom nor emulate. Somehow we forget that going into the heart of the ancient caliphate, taking out a dictator in three weeks, and then staying on to foster a constitutional republic amid a sea of enemies like Iran and Syria and duplicitous friends like Jordan and Saudi Arabia—and losing less than 4,000 Americans in the five-year enterprise—was beyond the ability of any of our friends or enemies, and perhaps past generations of Americans as well.

But more likely the American public, not the timeless nature of war, has changed. We no longer easily accept human imperfections. We care less about correcting problems than assessing blame—in postmodern America it is defeat that has a thousand fathers, while the notion of victory is an orphan. We fail to assume that the enemy makes as many mistakes but addresses them less skillfully. We do not acknowledge the role of fate and chance in war, which sometimes upsets our best endeavors. Most importantly we are not fixed on victory as the only acceptable outcome.

What are the causes of this radically different attitude toward military culpability? An affluent, leisured society has adopted a therapeutic and managerial rather than tragic view of human experience—as if war should be controllable through proper counseling or a sound business plan. We take for granted our ability to talk on cell phones to someone in Cameroon or select from 500 cable channels; so too we expect Saddam instantly gone, Jeffersonian democracy up and running reliably, and the Iraqi economy growing like Dubai's in a few seasons. If not, then someone must be blamed for ignorance, malfeasance, or inhumanity. It is as though we expect contemporary war to be waged in accordance with warranties, law suits, and prod-

uct recalls, and adjudicated by judges and lawyers in stale courtrooms rather than won or lost by often emotional youth in the filth, confusion, and barbarity of the battlefield.

Vietnam's legacy was to insist that if American aims and conduct were less than perfect, then they could not be good at all, as if a Stalinist police state in the North were comparable—or superior—to a flawed democracy in the South with the potential to evolve in the manner of a South Korea. The Vietnam War was not only the first modern American defeat, but also the last, and so its evocation turns hysterical precisely because its outcome was so unusual. Later victories in Grenada, Panama, Gulf War I, and the Balkans persuaded Americans that war could be redefined, at the end of history, as something in which the use of force ends quickly, is welcomed by locals, costs little, and easily thwarts tyranny. When all that proved less than true in Iraq, the public was ill-equipped to accept both that recent walk-over victories were military history's exceptions rather than its rule, and that temporary setbacks in Iraq hardly equated to Vietnam-like quagmires.

We also live in an age of instant communications increasingly contingent upon genre and ideology. The *New York Times*, CBS News, National Public Radio, and Reuters—the so-called mainstream media skeptical of America's morality and its ability to enact change abroad—instill national despair by conveying graphic scenes of destruction in Iraq without, however, providing much context or explaining how such information is gathered and selected for release. In turn, Fox News, the bloggers, and talk radio hear from their own sources that we are not doing nearly so badly, and try to offer real-time correctives to conventional newspapers and studios. The result is that the war is fought and refought in 24-hour news cycles among diverse audiences, in which sensationalism brings in ad revenues or enhances individual careers. Rarely is there any sober, reasoned analysis that examines American conduct over periods of six months or a year—not when the “shocking” stories of Jessica Lynch or Abu Ghraib or Scott Beauchamp make and sell better copy. Sensationalism was always the stuff of war reporting, but today it is with us in real time, 24/7, offered up by often anonymous sources, and filtered in a matter of hours or minutes by nameless editors and producers. Those relentless news alerts—tucked in between apparently more important exposés about Paris Hilton and Anna Nicole Smith—ultimately impart a sense of confusion and bewil-

derment about what war is. The result is a strange schizophrenia in which the American public is too insecure to believe that we can rectify our mistakes, but too arrogant to admit that our generation might make any in the first place.

What can be done about our impatience, historical amnesia, and utopian demands for perfection? American statesmen need to provide constant explanations to a public not well versed in history—not mere assertions—of what misfortunes to expect when they take the nation to war. The more a president evokes history's tragic lessons, the better, reminding the public that our forefathers usually endured and overcame far worse. Americans should be told at the start of every conflict that the generals who begin the fighting may not finish it; that what is reported in the first 24 hours may not be true after a week's retrospection, and that the alternative to the bad choice is rarely the good one, but usually only the far worse. They should be apprised that our morale is as important as our material advantages—and that our will power is predicated on inevitable mistakes being learned from and rectified far more competently and quickly than the enemy will learn from his.

Only that way can we reestablish our national wartime objective as victory, a goal that brings with it the acceptance of tragic errors as well as appreciation of heroic and brilliant conduct. The Iraq war and the larger struggle against the anti-American jihadists can still be won—and won with a resulting positive assessment of our overall efforts by future historians who will be far less harsh on us than we are now on ourselves. Yet if as a nation we instead believe that we cannot abide error, or that we cannot win due to necessary military, moral, humanitarian, financial, or geopolitical constraints, then we should not ask our young soldiers to continue to try. As in Vietnam where we wallowed in rather than learned from our shortcomings, we should simply accept defeat and with it the ensuing humiliating consequences. But it would be far preferable for Americans undertaking a war to remember these words from Churchill, in his 1930 memoir: “Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter.”

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NOVEMBER SURPRISE



SO FAR, THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN has been almost wholly encouraging to Democrats and disturbing to Republicans. To begin with, Americans have a fondness for alternation of power; parties seeking a third consecutive term have not fared well. In the past half-century, the incumbent party lost four of the five times it sought a third consecutive presidential term (1988 was the exception).

Throughout the past year, George W. Bush's approval ratings were stuck around 35%. Democrats led Republicans in the so-called "generic ballot," pitting an unnamed Democrat against an unnamed Republican, by 20 points or more. Democrats led Republicans on almost every major issue, and by substantial margins in fundraising. For most of the year, Democratic candidates led Republican candidates in head-to-head polls. By large margins, voters told pollsters that they thought the country was on the wrong track. Voter identification, which had been evenly split between the parties in 2004, was tilting in the Democrats' favor.

On the other hand, after ten months in power, the new Democratic Congress's approval ratings are lower than the president's. The Republican congressional leadership is also more than a match for their partisan counterparts, especially in the Senate, where Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has run circles around Majority Leader Harry Reid. As the situation on the ground in Iraq improved, public sentiment on the war shifted enough for

Republicans to keep Democrats from cutting off funds. And Democratic candidates lead head-to-head polls by considerably smaller margins than Democrats lead in the generic poll. The Republican candidates are significantly outperforming their party label. To the extent that the party "brand" is powerfully influenced by the president, the gap between the generic poll and the actual candidates implies that Republicans will have a better chance once the nominees are chosen and the nation gets down to the serious business of deciding between them. George W. Bush is not going to be on the ballot.

But elections are about much more than an accumulation of polling data and short term trends. The big picture revolves around a different sort of question: taking a longer view, what is the state of the parties?

What Do Republicans Stand For?

AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT, AFTER BATTLING the president for seven years on domestic policy and losing congressional control in 2006, Republicans are in some disarray. This will not change just because they settle quickly on a nominee in early 2008, if indeed they do. The speed with which the presidential race proceeded after the midterm elections has hampered the Republicans' ability to engage in some much needed soul-searching. Before they had an opportunity to think seriously about the party's philosophy or its

policy agenda, Republicans were thrust into the ritual of picking sides and obsessing about who polls best against Hillary Clinton. If it is possible for serious thinking to emerge during the give-and-take of the primaries themselves, a longer primary season is what Republicans should hope for, not a shorter one.

So far, the GOP has largely succumbed to the temptation of blaming either Bush and Iraq, or Bush and spending, or Congress and spending, or Congress and corruption for the party's 2006 debacle. All of those culprits share the blame, to be sure; but Republicans also grew too arrogant, too cynical, and too convinced that mechanics matter more than ideas. George Bush, Karl Rove, and former House majority leader Tom DeLay built a better political machine than Republicans had enjoyed in decades, but the president sabotaged the Republican reputation for limited government and ignored the task of explaining and advancing a public argument. As a result, Americans have lost a clear sense of what the Republican Party stands for, and the GOP may have lost a generation of voters. Until the party makes a decisive break with this approach, it will have difficulty overcoming its 2006 hangover.

There are also signs that the ground may be shifting under the Republican coalition, which has held for three decades. Big business is said to be taking a fresh look at the Democrats in search of rent-seeking policies on health care and in other areas. High-income earners are increasingly favor-

able to Democrats as well, perhaps on the basis of cultural liberalism (or to be more precise, the loss of Republican concern for limited government, which used to balance the GOP's social conservatism). At the same time, the party of secularism is making a concerted effort to woo evangelical voters, although it is too early to tell how much success it will have. More generally, many analysts posit that the long alliance between economic conservatives and social conservatives may be over. If Democrats can exploit these openings, they will have the opportunity for an electoral blowout and a long-term rearrangement of the party coalitions, putting them on top for the foreseeable future. Rich Lowry and Ramesh Ponnuru recently contended in the pages of the *National Review* that Republicans are facing the prospect of a "cataclysm," and they might be right.

Still, much of the above is (thus far) idle speculation. What we know is that in 2006 (as opposed to 2004) Republicans suffered stiff losses among independents, self-identified conservatives, and men. This is good news for Republicans in 2008 because these losses are less easily explained by a shift to liberalism in the electorate than by short-term frustrations over policy and performance on Iraq, spending, and immigration—exacerbated by the GOP's sense of entitlement and failure to explain to sympathetic but independent voters why Republicans should have kept their majority. The voters who deserted the party were not yearning for a return to the Great Society. A reasonably competent Republican presidential candidate, freed from association with an unpopular president, should be able to craft a message that will retrieve many of the voters lost in 2006. (Note to Democrats: if the GOP needs to recapture relatively conservative male independents, a highly partisan liberal feminist insider from New York may not be your best pick for 2008.)

Key Lessons for the GOP

ALTHOUGH REPUBLICANS HAVE NOT ENGAGED in an open, prolonged discussion about the future of their party, the campaign rhetoric so far suggests that the GOP has learned some key lessons.

First, "compassionate conservatism," elements of which alienated many conservative independents while attracting no liberals, seems likely to recede into memory like Dwight Eisenhower's "Modern Republicanism." Only two candidates in the Republican field—Mike Huckabee and Sam Brownback—could plausibly be considered disciples of compassionate conservatism, although even they called for greater vigilance against federal spending. Brownback departed the race in October, leaving Huckabee the sole compassionate conservative in the field. Every Republican candidate

has effectively embraced President Bush's tax cuts but repudiated his spending practices and penchant for centralization. Rudy Giuliani and Fred Thompson have returned federalism to a prominent place in their campaign rhetoric. Mitt Romney delivered a speech in September chastising Republicans for not acting like Republicans, a thinly veiled swipe at big-government conservatism. Although differences remain among them, all of the GOP contenders have embraced a tougher stand on immigration than the president has advocated. (Another element of compassionate conservatism, Bush's concern for outreach to minority groups, has also been jettisoned by most of the field, unwisely.) Republicans may be awakening to the fact that there is a constituency for a grown-up party after all.

Second, social conservatism continues to be an important part of the Republican formula. Of the four and a half major contenders, only Giuliani has a socially liberal record in office, and he has spent a large part of his campaign seeking ways to overcome it. Romney engaged in socially liberal campaign rhetoric in 1994, but has sought to atone for that with a more conservative record in office—and talking an even more conservative game during his presidential run. The other two and a half major candidates (McCain, Thompson, and Huckabee) have solid records in office supporting socially conservative positions. The pro-choice Giuliani surprised many analysts with his ability to stay atop the Republican polls for most of 2007, but observers have typically failed to note the critical difference between him and previous pro-choice Republican contenders. Senator Arlen Specter, for example, whose campaign went nowhere in 2000, built his candidacy around his position on abortion and made no secret of his contempt for the Religious Right. Giuliani has cultivated social conservatives, sought to allay their concerns, and has tried to make abortion utterly peripheral to his campaign. Specter did not angle for—let alone receive—Pat Robertson's endorsement.

Ultimately, Republicans are aided by three facts. On national security, which will continue to be a crucial issue in 2008, they are much more unified than the Democrats. Their minority status in Congress gives them a freedom of action they did not possess before November 2006. And the presidential nominee—no matter who he is—will be unconnected to the administration and under no compulsion to speak less than candidly about its shortcomings. The Republicans need a nominee like France's Nicolas Sarkozy who ran as a change candidate despite belonging to the incumbent's party. Fortunately for them, their field of contenders makes such a run highly plausible, as does the president's disappointing record on domestic policy. Republicans can run for change and for a more traditional conservatism at the same time.

The Democrats' Leftward Drift

DEMOCRATS, SITTING ATOP A BIG WIN in 2006 and a large collection of short-term advantages, nevertheless have their own worries. While the actual influence of the left-wing netroots might be exaggerated (witness Ned Lamont's failed bid to replace Joe Lieberman in the Senate), the netroots are increasingly coming to be seen as the Democratic Party's public face, and it is not a pretty one. Although the netroots could in theory spearhead a discussion among Democrats about the future of their party, they are almost wholly preoccupied with day-to-day minutiae and invective. As a result, little or no intellectual groundwork has been laid for either a big win by Democrats in 2008 or, perhaps more importantly, for what Democrats would do with a big win if they get it. Democrats are intellectually unprepared for the opportunity that may be handed them, making it unlikely that 2008 will be another 1932 or 1964 in policy terms even if they win a victory of comparable magnitude. Markos Moulitsas is not the next Herbert Croly, John Kenneth Galbraith, or Michael Harrington.

Instead, Democrats have simply drifted leftward willy-nilly and seem content to win in 2008 by running on dissatisfaction with Republicans. It worked in 2006, but that sort of victory is often unfruitful, as Democrats in Congress have found. Hillary Clinton has worked hard to burnish her credentials as a centrist, but it is more a commentary on the field than on her that she is the least left-wing of her party's major contenders. Democrats have failed to use their new majority to shore up their longstanding weaknesses on cultural and national security matters. To the contrary, the year-long debate over Iraq may have re-branded Democrats as the McGovernite party of defeat. They are in a vulnerable position, camped on exposed ground well to the left of where they were eight or twelve years ago, but they have not staked their ground with deliberate conviction. They have rather been herded there by a combination of the netroots' aggressiveness and their own diletantism and ingrained prejudices.

More generally, it cannot be considered a sign of the Democratic Party's vitality that Senator Clinton is the clear frontrunner. By virtually any objective standard the Democratic Party was weaker in 2000 than in 1992, and by many believable accounts a large number of Democratic officeholders were relieved in January 2001 to be done with the continuous embarrassments of the Clinton White House. Yet after two terms of Bush-era frustration, Democrats have seemingly forgotten how the Clintons deprived them of their majorities and their dignity, and are ready to go through it all over again. In any case, this is not a party with a deep bench.

Imponderables

IN 2002, JOHN JUDIS AND RUY TEIXIERA argued in their book *The Emerging Democratic Majority* that Democrats would benefit from a demographic surge of affluent, culturally liberal groups that would carry them to a majority by 2010. Michael Barone and others countered that Republicans were doing extremely well in the fastest-growing counties in America. We may actually be entering a moment in which the electorate in general is unsettled and in which almost anything can happen, not least because the parties themselves are unsettled.

In the end, the election will turn on a combination of short-term and long-term factors and critical events. Will the economy be strong or weak, and which candidate will be better positioned to take advantage of it? Will improvements in Iraq continue? Will war with Iran be averted, and if not, what will be the consequences? Will there be important Supreme Court decisions that affect the climate of the election? Will the Democratic Congress succeed in using its power to strengthen its party's nominee, or will its excesses become weapons in the Republican arsenal? Will there be one or more "third" parties, such as a pro-life party, an anti-immigration party, or a ticket for af-

fluent liberal independents? Not least, who will be the standard-bearers for each party?

Republicans may be, as pundits claim, on the verge of a crushing defeat that will hand Democrats both the presidency and a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. Yet there are two other plausible scenarios: 2008 as 1968, or as 1948. In each, the GOP today would play the electoral role of the Democrats then. In 1968, Democrats, who were saddled with an unpopular president, an unpopular war, and a collapsing New Deal coalition, nevertheless suffered only moderate losses in congressional elections and came very close to retaining the presidency. In 1948, faced with widespread "expert" belief in the inevitability of a GOP win, Democrats came roaring back with a hard-hitting campaign that reaffirmed their basic principles, exploited Republican divisions and complacency, and mobilized their own latent majority. Neither analogy is perfect. Iraq is not Vietnam in 1968 (a point in the Republicans' favor), and their nominee will not be an incumbent as in 1948 (another point in their favor). If she is nominated, Hillary Clinton may prove to be an uncanny combination of Thomas Dewey and Richard Nixon—evasive, unscrupulous, and constantly in the process of reinvention. Either

scenario promises a close election.

Much in 2008 will depend on whether Republicans succeed in distancing themselves from President Bush in a way that is principled rather than opportunistic, and whether they succeed in focusing Americans on the harsh realities of national security seven years after 9/11. Much, both before and after Election Day, will depend on Republicans constructing a broader philosophical framework for thinking about the issues at hand. They cannot avoid talking about health care or the environment, but they can talk about those things in a way that combines the practical and the principled. If Republicans can make their case convincingly, they might just win the election against the odds. And if they don't win the election, they can lay a stronger foundation for making a comeback in the battles that will ensue.

As Democrats proved in 2006, the wheel can always turn again. Americans, after all, have a fondness for alternation in power.

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Book Review by Jonah Goldberg

THE RAW DEAL

The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression,
by Amity Shlaes. HarperCollins, 480 pages, \$26.95



IN THE DEFINING MOMENT, HIS RECENT paean to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jonathan Alter claims to have made a genuine historical find: in 1932, members of FDR's inner circle had urged the new president to deputize the American Legion as—in Alter's words—an "extraconstitutional" "private army." In prepared remarks to be delivered to a meeting of the American Legion (and broadcast as his first radio address after his inauguration), FDR was to tell the assembled veterans, "As new commander-in-chief under the oath to which you are still bound, I reserve to myself the right to command you in any phase of the situation which now confronts us."

Alter's interpretation that this was "dictator talk—an explicit power grab" is entirely plausible for any number of reasons, including FDR's determination to use the World War I-era Trading with the Enemy Act as the legal justification for his dirigisme; a memo written at the Democratic Convention by future National Recovery Administration (NRA) head Hugh Johnson suggesting that the entire Congress and Supreme Court be sent into temporary exile while a Mussolini-style dictator set the country straight; and the widespread clamor for a "man of action" to run the country. Walter Lippmann himself urged FDR to assume "dictatorial powers."

But happily FDR didn't read his prepared remarks. Instead, he reiterated the rhetoric of his inaugural address, essentially designating the en-

tire American people as a single "great Army" he would lead in a "disciplined attack on our common problems." And with that, Alter exonerates FDR completely, dubbing him a champion of democracy, defending our way of life even from the authoritarian drives of his own advisors and speechwriters.

Alter's readers would never suspect that President Roosevelt scores as badly if not worse on the typical kinds of charges hurled against George W. Bush and his administration: militarism, ideological cabals, secrecy, lies and lying-us-into-war, unscrupulous punishment of political enemies, disrespect for the Constitution and our political traditions, run-amok Wilsonianism, special favors for Big Business, and, most of all, incompetence.

As historian William Leuchtenburg documented in his essay "The New Deal as Moral Analogue to War," Roosevelt's presidency was drenched in martial metaphors and militaristic appeals to loyalty and unity long before World War II. The New Deal's Public Works Administration (PWA) funded enormous rearmament, including two aircraft carriers, and even the Civilian Conservation Corps was organized along military lines. The preeminent Progressive historian Charles Beard was driven to the point of crankery in his rage against FDR's "Caesarism." Roosevelt's famed Brains Trust was the original ideological cabal, intent not so much on fixing the Depression as on using it as a pretext for schemes of radical reform.

The president ordered the domestic surveillance of his political enemies, and the House Un-American Activities Committee was organized in the 1930s—a decade before Joseph McCarthy became a senator—to hunt down "Browns," real and imagined. FDR's attempt to pack the Supreme Court was an assault on constitutional propriety far more sinister than the alleged irregularities of the *Bush v. Gore* recount decision. The four-term Roosevelt was our first and only president-for-life, flouting the two-term tradition begun by George Washington. He ran for his third term on the promise that he would keep American boys out of another "foreign war," even though he probably had other intentions.

BUT IT IS PARTICULARLY ON THE CHARGE of incompetence that Amity Shlaes's *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* mounts perhaps the best crafted indictment of FDR in at least the last half-century. Debunking the Roosevelt myth is hardly a new pastime, of course. It was already a cottage industry when John T. Flynn published *The Roosevelt Myth* in 1948. Libertarians like the late Murray Rothbard and, more recently, Jim Powell have written excellent broadsides against FDR and his New Deal. Shlaes's work is something different. Her book does not directly confront the standard hagiographies by Leuchtenburg, Frank Freidel, or Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.; nor does Shlaes, a finan-

cial columnist for Bloomberg News, advance her own polemical interpretation. Instead, she offers an almost novelistic rendering of the times, allowing the gray eminences of the 1930s, like Harold Ickes and Rexford Tugwell, to pop out as three-dimensional figures, but also bringing to life less well-known men and women who were affected, one way or another, by the New Deal.

The book's title is richly ironic. Roosevelt made the phrase "the forgotten man" famous as a populist slogan, synonymous with "the little guy" whom the New Deal was supposed to assist. But in doing so, FDR inverted the phrase's original meaning. A half-century earlier, Yale sociologist William Graham Sumner had written an essay about the businessmen, taxpayers, and workers who were generally asked to pay for the good deeds done by others through the instrumentality of government. According to Sumner,

As soon as A observes something which seems to him to be wrong, from which X is suffering, A talks it over with B, and A and B then propose to get a law passed to remedy the evil and help X. Their law always proposes to determine what C shall do for X, or in the better case, what A, B, and C shall do for X.... [W]hat I want to do is to look up C.... He is the man who never is thought of.

For Shlaes, C is also the forgotten man, but so are many of FDR's supposed beneficiaries. She begins her book with William Troeller, a 13-year-old boy whose Brooklyn family had fallen on hard times. At mealtimes the shy William felt guilty asking for his share of the meal when the rest of the family seemed to need it more. He hanged himself from the transom of his bedroom. The *New York Times* headline read: "He Was Reluctant About Asking for Food."

But Troeller didn't hang himself in 1929, one of the notorious suicides in the wake of the initial stock market crash on Black Tuesday. (In fact, Shlaes finds that contrary to legend, suicides didn't increase after Black Tuesday at all.) The boy killed himself in 1937, eight years into the Great Depression, and four years after the New Deal had set out to alleviate the nation's ills.

OF COURSE, THE NEW DEALERS DID NOT want to see children hang themselves, but the political focus was on interest groups rather than individuals. FDR and the New Dealers believed that progress called for wrenching systematic change. So if a few little guys had to be hammered down like obdurate square pegs unwilling to fit into round holes, so be it. In one of the most famous cases, not mentioned in this book, an immigrant dry cleaner named Jacob Maged was thrown in jail for months because he

charged 35 cents to press a suit when the federal government demanded a minimum price of 40 cents. Roosevelt's planners were convinced that traders, middlemen, small businessmen, and independent entrepreneurs were the problem because they made bureaucrats' balance sheets so untidy. "We are no longer afraid of bigness," proclaimed Rex Tugwell. "Unrestricted individual competition is the death, not the life of trade."

Shlaes illuminates the New Dealers' priorities with the case of the Schechter brothers, Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn who raised and sold Kosher chickens (Schechter is derived from the Yiddish word for "butcher"). They ran into trouble with the New Deal codes that said, in the name of quality assurance, that vendors couldn't let individual customers select their own chickens. Of course, "straight killing," as the practice was called, was itself a time-honored method of quality control (as were Kosher dietary laws generally). Nobody deliberately buys a diseased bird. But appeals to tradition, never mind religious tradition, were not merely unpersuasive to the New Deal's crusading progressives, but also insults to the "scientific" mind. The Schechters were harassed, fined, prosecuted, forced out of business, and ultimately sentenced to jail. They appealed all the way to the Supreme Court and won in the famous *Schechter* decision (1935) which, along with its companion cases, effectively ended the New Deal's National Recovery Administration. Although Roosevelt could now blame all of the country's troubles on the supposedly reactionary Supreme Court, the economy rallied after the decision.

THE BOOK FOCUSES ALSO ON THE TRANSFORMATION of another forgotten man, Wendell Willkie, the utility executive who became FDR's Republican challenger in 1940. Originally a New Deal sympathizer, Willkie grew disillusioned with its politics. By the presidential race, he called upon Roosevelt to "give up this vested interest that you have in depression" as the rationale for a "philosophy of distributed scarcity." Willkie was defeated in large part because Roosevelt's political revolution had succeeded, even if his economic one had failed. But Willkie had it right. FDR's political interests were deeply tied to continuing economic misery. His class-warfare rhetoric became self-fulfilling. The more the government failed, the more the people resented Big Business, and wanted Roosevelt to punish the "economic royalists." The longer the economy remained depressed, the more justifiable seemed the New Deal's permanent welfare state and its abandonment of federalism and other constitutional restraints on the federal establishment.

Although Shlaes notes that some industries cooperated with the New Deal, she dramatically downplays the point. (She de-emphasizes, too, the New Deal's roots in Woodrow Wilson's wartime

socialism.) By concentrating so much of her fire on the New Deal's encroachments into utilities regulations (in part to move Willkie's story along) and banking and trade (in order to explain the real causes of the Depression), she sometimes gives the impression that the 1930s amounted to a war between "business and government," the "private sector and the public sector."

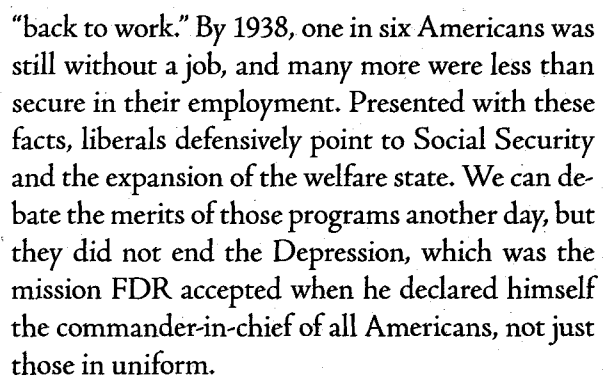
The reality was a bit more complicated. Industry leaders were desperate to be inside the tent, carving up the pie, and they were happy to prostitute themselves to the government as the price of admission. These supposed champions of the free market implored FDR to repeal anti-trust rules in the spirit of "cooperation." Henry I. Harriman, the retiring president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and H.P. Kendall, Chairman of the Business Advisory Council, were New Deal yes-men. "We are here to uphold the president's hand in the fight against the Depression," Kendall declared.

Shlaes does not mention Gerald Swope, the General Electric CEO who proposed a sweeping corporatist scheme toward the end of Herbert Hoover's presidency, whereby, according to Swope, industry would "no longer operate in independent units, but as a whole, according to rules laid out by a trade association of which every unit employing over fifty men is a member—and the whole supervised by some Federal agency." The "Swope Plan" was in many respects the intellectual foundation for the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA).

As Shlaes amply demonstrates, Big Businessmen, including Hoover, were very often progressives, too (Joan Hoff Wilson's 1975 biography is titled *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*). They had their own cults of efficiency, love of "bigness," and hostility to the independent entrepreneurs who made their lives difficult. As with the rise of the railroads in the 19th century, businesses often had a vested interest in having the government centralize and streamline the American economy. An aging Clarence Darrow was tasked with investigating the NRA and found that in "industry after industry" big businesses "have for their own advantage written the codes, and then, in effect and for their own advantage, assumed the administration of the code they have framed." J.T. Flynn's broadsides against the New Deal often came from this direction as well, believing that the collusion of business and government was a harbinger of fascism.

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE QUESTION OF Roosevelt's continued sanctity among liberals. In the liberal imagination, but also among Americans generally, there is a pervasive myth that the New Deal "worked." And most liberals seem content to leave it at that. But if you press them to explain what "worked" means, you will quickly find them shifting ground.

The New Deal didn't end the Great Depression. It didn't cure unemployment or get America



To admit this is to concede that the intellectual mandate of Roosevelt's Brains Trust was fraudulent as well. It sought to prove that "planning" was the way of the future and infinitely superior to the chaos of the free market. (And do note the arrogance of the term "Brains Trust." A trust is a monopoly, after all.) But, again as Shlaes shows, not only did planning not work very well—but there was far less real planning than we were led to believe. On one occasion, she points out, FDR raised the price of gold by 21 cents based upon his careful deduction that 21 is "a lucky number, because it's three times seven."

Some contend that these sorts of objections miss the point. Sure, the New Deal made mistakes, they'll concede, but it made them in the exciting spirit of "experimentation"—FDR's abracadabra word for "whatever I please." Left unelaborated is the fact that experimentation and planning are in fact opposites. One doesn't experiment in building a house; one plans, measuring twice and cutting once. The New Dealers cut first and measured later, if at all. Other liberals, like Jonathan Alter, try to find a safe harbor in poetry. FDR provided "hope." But for whom? Not for William Troeller, not for the Schechters, nor for Jacob Maged, nor for the countless sharecroppers thrown off their land or the workers left unemployed because their products were barred from export by New Deal trade policies. Another poetic harbor for liberals is the myth that FDR united the country. At least in those days, the sentiment runs, we were all in it together. But we weren't all in it together, at least not according to Roosevelt. He routinely and blithely made scape-

goats of the wealthy (and not so wealthy), blaming the Depression on "the lack of honor of some men in high financial places" and vindictively prosecuting Andrew Mellon for years. Moreover, the 1930s, like the 1960s, were a time of riotous social unrest and profound ideological conflict. If unity itself were the highest virtue, liberals would look at the 1920s and the 1950s with admiration instead of contempt.

NEVERTHELESS, AS IS OFTEN THE CASE, the poetry gets us closer to the truth than the social science does. When liberals speak of unity and hope, what they really mean is success. The 1930s and 1960s, unlike the '20s and '50s, were decades when liberals, broadly speaking, were "winning." When you hear liberals bemoaning divisiveness and insisting that we must "get beyond" "labels" and "ideological" differences, what they are really saying is that their opponents should shut up and get with the program. The New Deal's appeal lies in the fact that it was the first time when progressive social engineers had real power without the galvanizing dynamic of a war. The Brains Trusters had spent much of the 1920s complaining "we planned in war," i.e., during World War I; they insisted that they should be allowed to plan in peace as well. The Depression gave them their shot. And that in a nutshell is why supposedly empirically minded and "reality-based" liberals still genuflect to the myth of the New Deal. It is the *ne plus ultra* of liberal power. Defending the New Deal is the first requirement of liberal power-worship.

Of course, FDR was no cruel dictator. But he saw nothing wrong with using the mechanisms and aesthetics of dictatorship in order to advance the Progressive transformation of the American state. Roosevelt himself privately acknowledged that "what we were doing in this country were some of the things that were being done in Russia and even some of the things that were being done under Hitler in Germany. But we were doing them in an orderly way." That so many liberals today find that not only forgivable but laudable

should tell us something about their ambition. After all, the FDR myth remains liberalism's most "usable past."

If there is a major drawback to Shlaes's brilliantly crafted indictment it is that it takes liberals at their word about what the New Deal was really about. She must do this, of course, if she is going to rebut their arguments. But in truth, the economic policies are merely symptoms of the larger disease. FDR was economically incompetent, as Shlaes demonstrates, but he was politically ingenious. Indeed, as she and others have chronicled, FDR's economic missteps were part of a larger political ballet. He transformed American politics by creating vast client constituencies who depended on the government—and by extension the Roosevelt Administration—for their livelihood. Such an enterprise stemmed first and foremost from a philosophical vision, not a mere economic one. FDR's economic policies, like his political maneuvering in general, were means to an end. Recommitting liberalism to the doctrine of a "living constitution" pioneered by Woodrow Wilson, the New Dealers believed that the Constitution could be reinterpreted on the fly, to create a new open-ended constitutionalism that depended not on texts, but on the will of those in charge of interpreting them. "I want to assure you," FDR's aide Harry Hopkins told an audience of New Deal activists in New York, "that we are not afraid of exploring anything within the law, and we have a lawyer who will declare anything you want to do legal." One can only imagine what Jonathan Alter might have said if Karl Rove had been caught saying such a thing.

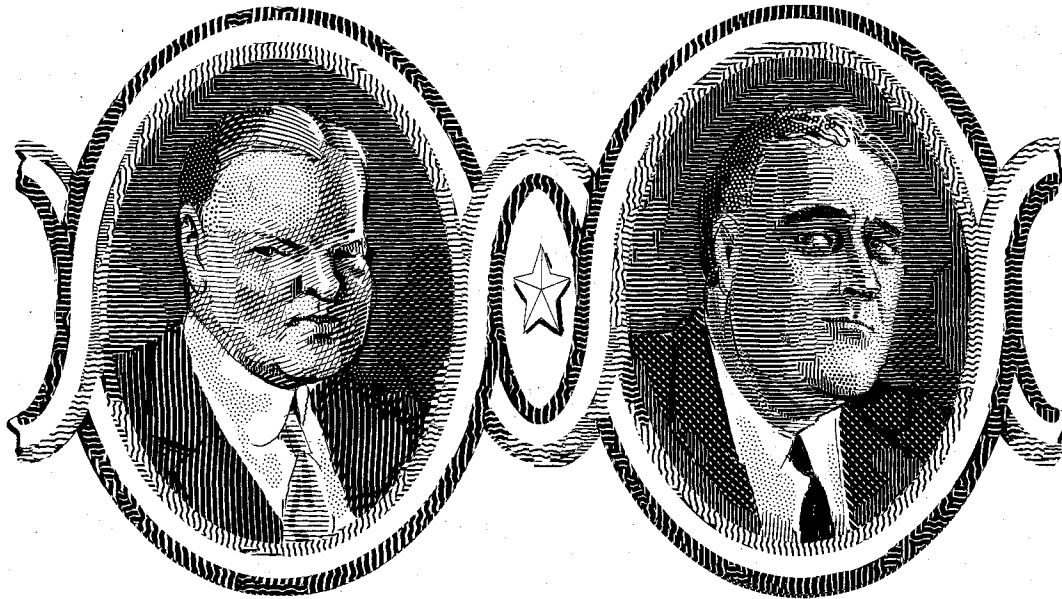
For nearly three generations, liberal intellectuals have consistently refused to apply the same standards to their own heroes that they relentlessly misapply to their villains. Amity Shlaes's *The Forgotten Man* is a careful, even-tempered, and much needed corrective to this sorry history.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-at-large of National Review Online and author of Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning (Doubleday).

Book Review by William Schambra

DEBATING THE NEW DEAL

The Two Faces of Liberalism: How the Hoover-Roosevelt Debate Shapes the 21st Century,
edited by Gordon Lloyd. M&M Scrivener Press, 432 pages, \$39.95



EVEN AS AMERICAN CONSERVATIVES FACE and attempt to shape an uncertain future, they face and attempt to shape their own past as well. In particular, today's conservatives seek political wisdom from intellectual forebears who might help them in their present struggles to preserve liberty against liberal collectivism. This essentially backward-looking project takes the form of an archeological dig, the first stage of which is to bulldoze from the site sprawling acres of tendentious scholarship. We are thus indebted to Pepperdine University political scientist Gordon Lloyd, who in his splendid edited collection *The Two Faces of Liberalism: How the Hoover-Roosevelt Debate Shapes the 21st Century*, has applied his bulldozer to the New Deal era.

Perhaps nowhere else in 20th century historical scholarship is the story line less flattering to conservatism. As it typically goes, the heartless, clueless conservative President Herbert Hoover, paralyzed by a dogmatic adherence to laissez faire individualism, stood by and watched as the nation slid into steep economic depression in the 1930s. Thank heaven, then, for the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who cast aside the narrow, liberty-obsessed liberalism of the past, and introduced a new liberalism, featuring a powerful national government dedicated to alleviating the plight of "one-third of a nation ill housed, ill clad, and ill nourished," and to providing the material conditions necessary for genuine equality of opportunity.

Lloyd, however, probes beneath the clichés and constructs a richer and livelier understanding of the New Deal era. Here, Roosevelt's storied pronouncements are matched by thoughtful and hard-hitting responses from Hoover, who did not in fact fade into the woodwork after losing to FDR in 1932 but rather spoke out for years thereafter against the New Deal. In *Two Faces of Liberalism*, Lloyd includes not only Roosevelt's major addresses—his speeches to San Francisco's Commonwealth Club and Oglethorpe University in 1932, his Inaugural Addresses from 1933, 1937, and 1941, and the transcripts of various "Fireside Chats"; but also a fine selection of Hoover's long-forgotten speeches, including his efforts to explain "Our American System" during his 1928 presidential campaign and presidency, as well as radio transcripts and addresses at various Republican party events.

For conservatives, the most interesting question presented by Lloyd's volume is this: should we embrace Herbert Hoover as one of our own? After all, as these readings demonstrate, even well before the advent of the New Deal, Hoover was an eloquent defender of individual liberty against the collectivism of the age. In a campaign speech in October 1928, he argued that our "political and social system" was "founded upon a particular conception of self-government in which decentralized local responsibility is the very base." Furthermore, "only through ordered liberty, freedom, and equal opportunity to the individual will his initiative and enterprise spur

on the march of progress." Hoover argued that during the First World War the federal government "became a centralized despotism which undertook unprecedented responsibilities, assumed autocratic powers, and took over the business of citizens. To a large degree we regimented our whole people temporarily into a socialistic state." Upon returning to power after Woodrow Wilson's tenure, he continued, the Republican Party faced a "choice between the American system of rugged individualism and a European philosophy of diametrically opposed doctrines...of paternalism and state socialism." Republicans chose to go "resolutely back to our fundamental conception of the state and the rights and responsibilities of the individual."

Given such an assessment of Wilsonian "despotism," it is hardly surprising that Hoover should have found the New Deal deeply alarming as well. Franklin Roosevelt, after all, looked back to the mobilization for the Great War and came to a diametrically opposed conclusion: that it represented, as he put it in the "Forgotten Man" radio address of April 7, 1932, a "great plan," conceiving of a "whole nation mobilized for war" with "economic, industrial, social and military resources gathered into a vast unit" capable of meeting any national challenge. Small wonder that FDR should revert to a military analogy in his First Inaugural Address, calling for the nation to "move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline."

Hoover saw in the New Deal "a mixture of coercion, collectivism, and lust for personal power poured into the American system of free men," and he saw the Republican Party as "the conservative party in the sense of preserving true liberalism."

BEFORE WE INSTALL HOOVER'S BUST IN THE pantheon of conservative heroes, however, we would do well to heed the warning issued by Hoover biographer George Nash in the Foreword to this volume: "Herbert Hoover was not a pure Reaganite; there was in him too much of the social engineer and temperamental activist for such a label to be affixed to his name." Indeed, Hoover was more a progressive than a conservative Republican, closer in political convictions to Theodore Roosevelt than to Ronald Reagan.

For all his concern with preserving American individualism, for instance, Hoover was certain that we had "long since abandoned the laissez faire of the 18th century—the notion that it is 'every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.'" Our national sensibilities were rapidly progressing beyond that faulty notion, he wrote in 1920, "steadily developing the ideals that constitute progressive individualism." Among the "glorious spiritual forces" growing within the American people "is a rising vision of service. Indeed if I were to select the social force that above all others has advanced sharply during these past years of suffering, it is that of service—service to those with whom we come in contact, service to the nation, and service to the world itself."

This new "progressive individualism" laid the moral foundation for Hoover's larger political project, rooted in his sensibilities as a Stanford-trained engineer, and first applied as Secretary of Commerce under Presidents Harding and Coolidge. Because Americans had "in the past quarter of a century evolved a higher sense of organized co-operation than has ever been known before," as he put it in 1928, every major segment of American social and economic life was gathering in all-encompassing associations, willing and able to work out their differences peaceably, because many had been "founded solely on public interest."

Critical to the growth of Hoover's "associationism" were the new social sciences, such as economics and public administration, which would

supposedly generate objective social data in service of the progressive vision. Government would play the role of facilitator, according to Hoover, serving "to bring together discordant elements and to secure co-operation between different industries and groups."

Indeed, as political scientist Barry Karl has suggested, the quintessential expression of Hoover's progressivism was his mobilization of the U.S.'s social scientists to gather data for the President's Research Committee on Social Trends. In his preface to the committee's 1933 report, Hoover praised the "the scientific mood and the scientific method as correctives to indiscriminating emotional approach and to insecure factual basis in seeking for constructive remedies of great social problems."

As the nation sank into the Depression, Hoover initially clung to associationalism as his preferred approach. But he also proved perfectly willing to spend federal dollars indirectly to sustain wages and employment, boasting in 1930 that his administration was "engaged upon the greatest program of waterway, harbor, flood control, public building, highway, and airway improvement in all our history," and at the end of his administration embracing the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, an immediate precursor to similar New Deal programs. Even in full stride as a New Deal critic, Hoover would boast that it was the Republican Party that had "created seven out of the ten great Federal regulating agencies of today," as well as federal income and estate taxes, limitations on hours of employment for women and children, old-age pensions, mother's pensions, "and a score of other social reforms."

Small wonder, then, that the economist Wesley Mitchell would point out that Hoover's objections to New Deal planning were ill-conceived, writing to him that "though you frequently couple national planning with regimentation...you are really an exponent of deliberate and thorough planning." Or that, as historian Joan Hoff Wilson would note, FDR aide Rexford Tugwell would claim in a 1974 interview that "practically the whole New Deal was extrapolated from programs that Hoover started."

Conservatives, then, should understand that although Hoover could certainly be a spirited crit-

ic of the New Deal, his distinctly progressive liberalism and FDR's own brand had surprising, or rather, disappointing similarities. Lloyd is correct to call these political antagonists the "two faces of liberalism."

THE BOOK'S TITLE HAS ANOTHER LESSON to teach, however. One of FDR's great achievements was to rescue 20th-century progressivism from its own worst propensities. Like Hoover, Roosevelt sought policy advice from a cadre of progressive social scientists, but he added a profoundly human face to progressivism's otherwise antiseptic, technocratic, social-engineering essence. What we most remember FDR for was his ability to assure the average American that a genuine, compassionate human being sat in the Oval Office, acutely aware of, and doing everything possible to alleviate, the suffering of "one third of a nation." That was something Hoover was notoriously unable to do. Ironically, this left conservatism, rather than technocratic liberalism, with a reputation for coldness and indifference to public distress.

Since the New Deal, progressive liberalism has prospered whenever it manages to put on a warm, human, New Deal face—think President Clinton's "I feel your pain"—and has suffered whenever it wears its cold, technocratic face—for example Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, with its swarms of social engineers blindly disrupting neighborhoods and social traditions, or President Carter (the "nuclear engineer") with his propensity for elaborate national plans for every American problem.

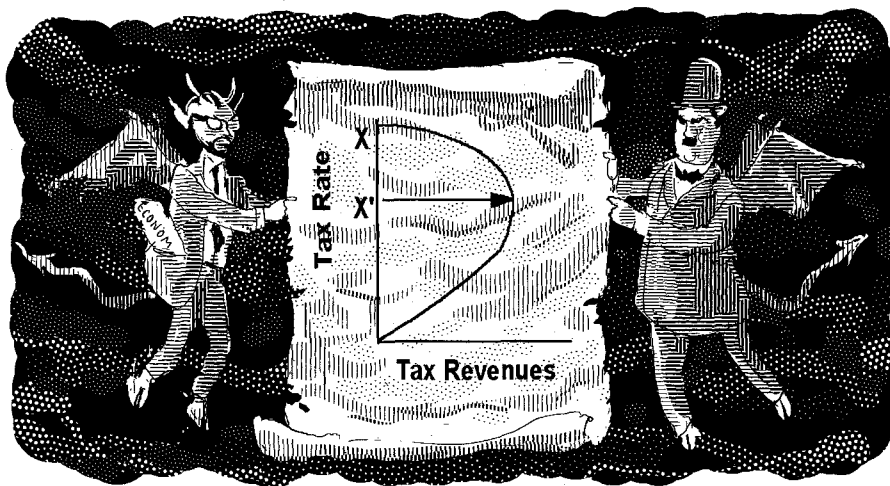
For its part, conservatism is often hampered by its inability to offer a genuine alternative to liberal technocracy, since conservatism, too, can wear a sterile, managerial face. Too often, it seems, we are more hostile to liberalism's populist side than to its technocratic side—foreseeing a greater danger in FDR's expansive compassion than Hoover's technocratic hard edges. It was a mistake that Ronald Reagan, who proudly began his political life as a New Deal Democrat, never made.

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Book Review by Ramesh Ponnuru

ECON ARTIST

The Big Con: The True Story of How Washington Got Hoodwinked and Hijacked by Crackpot Economics,
by Jonathan Chait. Houghton Mifflin, 304 pages, \$25



REPUBLICANS, INCLUDING PRESIDENT BUSH, have said a lot of silly things in defense of tax cuts. In the opening pages of *The Big Con*, Jonathan Chait, a senior editor at the *New Republic*, zeroes in on the way conservatives have abused the Laffer Curve—and more reflective conservatives should wince to read those pages.

The Laffer Curve, you will recall, is a graphical representation of the simple truth that above a certain point, increases in the tax rate will prove self-defeating: they will so discourage economic activity that they will cause revenue to decline. But as Chait points out, it does not follow from this fact that every tax cut will increase revenue. If our tax rate is already below the revenue-maximizing point, then reducing that rate will reduce revenue. The effect of a particular tax cut on revenues is an empirical matter, not something that can be deduced from first principles.

Yet many Republicans, and conservative journalists, have claimed that tax cuts always raise revenue. (Chait quotes John McCain, who told me earlier this year, “Tax cuts, starting with Kennedy, as we all know, increase revenues.”) President Bush points out that revenues have increased since he cut taxes. That’s true. He then concludes that “the deficit would have been bigger without the tax-relief package,” which is a non sequitur. The tax cuts caused all of that revenue growth only if they are responsible for all of the economic growth that has happened since their enactment. That would be a very implausible assumption. A more realistic one would suggest that Bush’s tax cuts have caused revenues to grow more slowly than they would otherwise have done: that revenues are lower than they would have been without his tax cuts.

Chait also points out that Bush adopted this argument opportunistically. Originally he sold his tax cuts as a way of getting rid of the budget surplus—remember that?—so that Washington could not spend it. Only later, when the surplus had disappeared, did his spokesmen start saying that tax cuts were necessary to bring it back.

Conservatives regularly exaggerate the effect of taxes on the economy, as when they attributed the 1990 recession to the first President Bush’s tax increase and predicted that doom would follow President Clinton’s 1993 tax increase. Chait puts his finger on the analytical failure here. Ronald Reagan cut the top tax rate from 70% to 50% and then to 28%. That meant that high-earners went from keeping 30 cents of every extra dollar they earn, to 50, to 72. So their reward on effort went up 67% and then an additional 44%. The 1990 and 1993 tax increases, which took the top rate to 39.6%, had a much smaller effect. Together they reduced incentives by 44%. Conservatives who condemned each tax increase separately, as a guarantee of disaster, just didn’t do the math.

Conservatives have also argued for tax cuts on the basis of the theory that they will “starve the beast,” i.e., that they will bring government spending down. Chait, for the most part, argues that this theory is incorrect. In my view, what has happened here is another case of a valid insight being taken too far. Milton Friedman correctly noted that total federal spending must equal federal revenues plus the maximum politically acceptable deficit. But it does not follow that reducing revenues would reduce spending. If the effort to reduce revenues also increased the political system’s tolerance of deficits—because advocates of the tax cuts said

that deficits do not matter, or because they made voters regard government as a source of goodies—then spending could go up.

CHAIT IS AT HIS BEST—FUNNY, SMART, and sparkling—in these early sections of the book. But his ambitions go well beyond disproving some economic assertions that conservatives are wont to make. That conservatives make false claims about taxes is just one link in a chain of premises leading to his destination: that a cabal of fanatics and plutocrats are running the country. Not surprisingly, the argument weakens as Chait goes along.

One weak link is Chait’s unstable definition of “supply-side economics.” According to Chait, “supply-siders don’t believe in the business cycle. They believe tax rates determine everything.” But very few people meet that description, which is perhaps why Chait doesn’t supply a quote from anyone to back up the claim. My colleague Lawrence Kudlow is surely a pure supply-sider if ever there was one. But not even he believes that taxes determine everything: he spent a lot of time this summer arguing for a change in the Federal Reserve’s monetary policy.

Chait identifies several conservative figures and organs of opinion as “supply-siders” because they almost always support tax cuts. Bob Dole is described as having adopted “the Laffer Curve” because he proposed tax cuts in his presidential campaign in 1996; but he didn’t claim that those tax cuts would raise revenue. Nor do all conservative journals claim that tax cuts invariably increase revenue, and in fact none claims that recessions are purely the result of tax policy.

Chait doesn't advance an argument against this viewpoint. He never claims that Clinton's tax increase promoted growth in the 1990s, or that Bush's tax cuts have failed to promote growth in this decade. And it's not the only question Chait doesn't consider. Do estate taxes reduce capital formation and induce a lot of unproductive tax-avoiding activity? Would the economy do better if we went from taxing income to taxing consumption? How much has conservative tax policy contributed to the increase in inequality in recent decades? (Chait asserts, without offering any numbers, that it has "without a doubt contributed mightily" to this gulf.)

IN SHORT, YOU CAN ACCEPT EVERYTHING Chait has to say about the folly of exaggerated claims about taxes and still think conservatives were right in their bottom-line conclusions about tax policy over the last two decades. If that's true, then the notion that a cabal of fanatics and plutocrats has hijacked American politics loses a lot of its power.

If that conceit were valid, of course, it would raise the question of how a small, nutty group seized so much power. Much of *The Big Con* is devoted to answering that question. The answer is not that the cabal's nostrums are popular. Chait points to surveys that show that over the last decade the public has preferred either deficit reduction or social spending to tax cuts. Chait is surprisingly dismissive of one answer that has currency on the Left: that the GOP has exploited social issues in order to deflect voters from its economic platform. He rejects that theory because the coun-

try has gotten more socially liberal during the very years that supply-side Republicans have been gaining power. (His reasoning goes awry here. A society can be happy with the changes it has made and still want to apply the brakes.)

Instead, Chait posits that the cabal succeeded by lying. It exploited outdated norms: the press, seeking to be evenhanded, could not see the rise of a new, extremist ideology and would not report on it as such. The cabal distracted the media and the public by inventing the “character issue” to use against Democrats. And it built a political machine willing to abuse power to get its way. Most of what Chait has to say here is partisan wailing. Just about every example of Republican dissembling or ruthlessness can be met with a counterexample on the Democratic side.

Chait says it cannot be a coincidence that the last three Democratic presidential nominees have been denounced as unprincipled flip-flopers; and that it's unlikely that Democrats simply tend to have little character. These thoughts start him theorizing about how Republicans have injected a spurious critique of Democratic vacillation into the nation's political bloodstream. As is often the case when Chait is writing in this vein, all the benefit of the doubt goes toward the service of his thesis. So John Kerry is defended against the charge of flip-flopping on the defense-supplemental bill of 2004, the one he famously voted for before voting against. Chait's defense is that Kerry voted for it when it was paid for by raising taxes and voted against it when it wasn't. But he ignores the fact that Kerry had himself said previously that it would be irresponsible to vote against the bill, even in the absence of a tax increase. Leave that aside. Most Republican presidential candidates of the past century have been attacked as dumb. Surely that's not a coincidence, either? Should we try to explain this phenomenon by reference to a Democratic dirty-tricks machine?

Double standards abound in *The Big Con*. The defeat of Clinton's health-care and economic stimulus bills by a Congress of the same party shows that Democrats don't have a disciplined party machine; the failure of Bush's Social Security reform and nomination of Harriet Miers just shows how extreme he is. The fact that Clinton's health proposal polled worse when it was attached

to his name shows how Republicans use personal attacks; the fact that the same thing could be said about Bush's Social Security proposal is not mentioned. President Bush's support for the farm bill of 2002 and for steel tariffs shows that Republicans will do anything to help corporate interests; Democrats' support for both initiatives is passed over in silence. The fact that modern Republicans propose to abolish the estate tax, something they would never have done 30 years ago, is proof that the party has been radicalized; the fact that modern Democrats routinely filibuster conservative judicial nominees, which they would never have done 30 years ago, is indicative of nothing (a type of omission that says a lot about Chait's narrow focus).

BUT ENOUGH. HOW PERSUASIVE YOU WILL find Chait's account, or my attempt to poke holes in it, will depend on whether you are the type of person who considers plausible his claim that the press debunks President Bush's factual claims only on "rare occasions."

Chait is nostalgic for a time when people who wanted to cut taxes and shrink the government were marginalized, when the New Deal consensus was robust, and when the Republican party was typified by people like David Gergen and Kenneth Duberstein. It would be easy to construct a sort of anti-matter version of Chait's story if you were nostalgic for the days when, say, the Democrats were a relatively socially conservative party and nobody dreamed of defending partial-birth abortion. You could talk about the extremism of current policy—abortion on demand for all nine months, and the lies and subversions of democracy that have kept that policy in place—and you would be right on all counts. I wrote that book myself. But I didn't say that a small cabal had hijacked the national government.

Chait writes that “the supply-siders have taken the germ of a decent point—that marginal tax rates matter—and stretched it, beyond all plausibility, into a monocausal explanation of the world.” Physician, heal thyself.

Ramesh Ponnuru is a senior editor at National Review and author of The Party of Death: The Democrats, the Media, the Courts, and the Disregard for Human Life (Regnery).

Book Review by Harvey C. Mansfield

TIMELESS MIND

Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: the Making of a Political Philosopher, by Eugene R. Sheppard.
Brandeis University Press, 188 pages, \$24.95

Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography, by Daniel Tanguay, translated by Christopher Nadon.
Yale University Press, 275 pages, \$30



THESE TWO BOOKS ON LEO STRAUSS—two more!—cover the development of Strauss's thought. They differ in two obvious ways. Daniel Tanguay is sympathetic to Strauss and might reasonably be called a Straussian, a particularly supple and elegant one. He works from within Strauss's thought, neither taking him for granted nor rejecting his premises. Eugene Sheppard is an intellectual historian who as such rejects the possibility of the "timeless mind" that Strauss accepts, and who therefore writes from a perspective outside Strauss. But he is not unfriendly to him, and thanks him for having "widened my own horizons."

The other difference is over Strauss's conservatism. Tanguay thinks it to be merely "circumstantial," and to hold otherwise he regards as a "fundamental error." Sheppard, however, believes that conservatism is the key to Strauss and says so repeatedly. Strauss came to America "an obscure conservative immigrant," and there acquired his "American persona" as a conservative. It so happens I can assure Professor Sheppard that these phrases, true or not, would have greatly amused

Strauss for the struggle they reveal between honesty and good will. Since Tanguay's book was originally published in French in 2003 (and is now ably translated by Christopher Nadon), Sheppard was in a position to take note of it in his book—which he did, but without commenting on the opposition between his thesis and Tanguay's.

What were Strauss's politics? To answer, one must consider the status of his politics in his thought. By denying the possibility of timelessness, or of permanent questions in human life, Sheppard installs the impermanent, the trendy, as sovereign over us. To do so raises the status of politics. For when well examined, the trends in human life prove to be political in character. Trends may begin as ways of thinking and behaving, but they become trends when they become dominant by taking over the politics of a society. In accepting the historicist view Sheppard is impelled toward exaggeration of the meaning of politics in Strauss's life. Now, Sheppard is aware that Strauss thought himself to be in a sense above politics, that he had (as he said) sworn an oath to the flag of *moriatur anima mea mortem philosophorum* ("may my soul die

the death of philosophers"). But to Sheppard this means that Strauss's devotion to timeless truth compels him to place such truths "beyond question and examination" politically, hence to be a conservative. He assumes that the philosopher's search for truth leads him to fix on truths, as if the search were always successful, and then to want to defend them. But why are fixed truths only conservative? Do not liberals have fixed truths?

SHEPPARD IS NOT WRONG TO SUPPOSE THAT a philosopher must have a political position. But the philosopher is led to it not so much by the conclusions of philosophy as by the conditions that make philosophy possible. The philosopher would choose between liberalism and conservatism not because he is skeptical like a liberal or claims truth like a conservative but because one or the other better protects and tolerates the philosopher's way of life. This concern with his own self-interest gives the philosopher a certain elevation over normal, non-philosophical politics, an elevation that can appear as uncalled-for levity in a serious situation.

The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin

Lorraine Smith Pangle

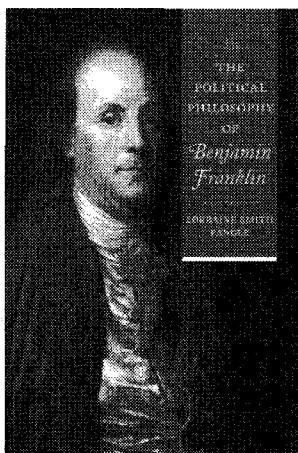
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An example can be seen in a letter dated May 19, 1933, from Strauss to his friend Karl Löwith, which Sheppard quotes at not-quite-enough length. In it Strauss shows a "shocking" (Sheppard's term) receptivity to conservatism in speaking of how to deal with what he called the "shabby monster" of Nazism. Instead of making a "laughable and pathetic" appeal to the rights of man—the fixed truths of liberalism—Strauss proposes resorting to the principles of the Roman empire, in Virgil's words, "to spare the subjects and subdue the proud." This is what "men of science" should say. The shocking thing is that Strauss says they should speak to right-wing Germany (as it has become) in terms of right-wing principles: "fascist, authoritarian, imperial." The implication in this progression of terms is that the fascist ordering that consigns Jews like Strauss to the status of natural *Untermenschen* can be best opposed by consenting to the need for authority, but replacing the principles of the Third Reich with those of the Roman empire. Strauss says that the "men of science," including himself, have no place to stay but only seek (*non habemus locum manentem, sed quaerimus*). It is as if they, from their platform above, were refuting Nazi "natural right" with Roman rather than liberal natural right, replacing vicious right-wing principles with benign ones.

THE LETTER CERTAINLY CONFIRMS Strauss's disgust with the liberalism of Weimar Germany, a pitiful and cowardly liberalism unable to defend itself against the Nazis because it had abandoned its own fixed truths and absorbed much of the relativism of German nihilism. According to Strauss in a 1941 lecture, German nihilism was the enemy, not liberalism; but Weimar liberalism, having abandoned Enlightenment liberalism in favor of historicist relativism, had shown itself to be powerless against the enemy. Obviously this was not the case with all liberalism in 1933, for Strauss fled the Nazi enemy to France, then England, and finally, the United States—all liberal democracies and the last two, it turned out, not incurably infected with appeasement. In effect, Strauss's letter warns Löwith against putting his trust in the liberals (and Christians) of Germany who had given false assurance of security to German Jews.

The letter to Löwith is not Strauss's last or only statement on the liberal democracies he lived in and benefited from, but this is not the place to work out an analysis of Strauss's politics. The default politics of the classical political philosophers is the rule of gentlemen, the rule of moral virtue with which philosophy has for the most part a mutually amiable coexistence. Gentlemen are not always available, however—not even in liberal democracies, where in elections their vir-

tues are often not duly appreciated. So one must search for rougher or smoother types who might approximate gentlemen. Strauss's letter shows the condescension of a philosopher's politics in its levity and flexibility at a very serious moment when the lives of the two correspondents were at stake. To be sure, it also shows thoughtfulness, care, and insight. And it shows that Strauss's politics were not back of his philosophy but rather the reverse.

SHEPPARD'S BOOK HAS SOME GOOD THINGS to say about Strauss. In agreement with Strauss he sees that Xenophon's politic concealment of his distaste for Sparta was bashful accommodation rather than opportunistic pandering. He effectually denies that Strauss was a victim of paranoia. To explain Strauss, he tries to combine the philosopher's elevation with the Jew's isolation in what he calls "the politics of exile." Is exile not a timeless category? Perhaps it is, if the political community is not capable of satisfying every human good; there might always be some leftover person, a Socrates, too outstanding for others to appreciate. "Exile" as an idea by which to understand Strauss is neither crazy nor foolish, but it elides the distinction between philosophy and revelation that Strauss insisted on, and it suggests that exile is caused only by political discord. Sheppard suspects that Strauss, who read esoterically, may also have written esoterically, and getting into the spirit of the thing, he attempts with all good will to interpret one of his lectures. And in general his prose is enlivened with frequent quotation from Strauss.

Not so good is Sheppard's disdain for Straussians. He thinks that they (he doesn't name them) have written "clever or boring hagiographies" of Strauss. Well, at least the clever ones are not boring, and the boring ones not clever. He thinks too that Strauss was a "charismatic leader" with an inner circle on the model of the Nietzschean Stefan George, "a circle of devoted disciples" who patterned their "idiosyncratic scholarship" on the insider/outsider approach as opposed to "liberal models of education." Presumably liberal models are public exchanges in which everyone sincerely tells the truth and nobody is excluded or "exiled." Let me confide to Professor Sheppard, however, that if one becomes a Straussian, one learns the meaning of outsider much more quickly than that of insider. To use a euphemism, an outsider is "idiosyncratic." In any case, if there's no harm in telling the truth, what's wrong with teaching it and following it? Or is something so wrong with liberal models of education that they have trouble inducing the very openmindedness they habitually extol? It is of course no great pain in itself to be called idiosyncratic, but the condescension and exclusion in such language can be as effectual as it is polite.



WHEN TANGUAY'S BOOK WAS PUBLISHED in 2003, he could claim to have produced the first comprehensive study of Strauss's thought; now that it has been joined by several others, one can say too that it is the most satisfactory. It is faithful to Strauss's principle that a thinker must be understood as he understood himself, and it is a serious study, with matter and insight helpful even to veterans of the Strauss circle. Yet it is not a book that barks like a dog at intruders, and it will not seem either boring or clever to those who have not read Strauss.

Tanguay notes two obstacles to understanding Strauss's thought, the first being that Strauss wrote studies in the history of political philosophy—interpretive commentaries on great political philosophers in which his own opinion is often left unclear, not identified, never thematic. Strauss asks questions of the author, then answers them himself, jumping back and forth from the role of prompter to that of respondent, and often with several arguments in each role. Who is Strauss himself, given that he is almost never to be seen by himself but rather in the company of a great mind he is talking to? He was a great teacher and certainly sought to have a school of Straussians, but he did not have a doctrine and he did not encourage or even permit his students to write about him in the manner of Oakeshottians, Voegelinians, and Rawlsians. Straussians were to write in the history of political philosophy and to consider their teacher as a mere professor, not as the philosopher he undoubtedly was. Only with time, as Strauss's rank has become clearer—and as he has come under political attack—has his mostly implicit wish lost its authority and his followers ventured to write about him, in some cases rushing into the breach to defend him. In doing so they have encountered the second difficulty that Tanguay mentions, which almost follows from the first: Strauss writes in a veiled if not hidden manner. He wanted to be admired, it seems, but for reasons that would always be unclear and disputed. Yet you could not make a better start at understanding him than with Tanguay's book nor find a more balanced, finished treatment.

Tanguay finds one guiding theme in Strauss's thought: the theologico-political problem. Other themes—the distinction between the ancients and the moderns, the old quarrel between poetry and philosophy, the conflict between natural right and history—are more obvious and better known, but they lead to the theologico-political problem underneath. The break with the ancients made by modern thought took for granted the possibility of philosophy, indeed of political philosophy. But the possibility of political philosophy needs to be shown by contrast to the claim of revelation and its political branch, political theology. The quarrel between poetry and philosophy was not so much an issue between story and truth as

between the gods of the poets and the god of the philosophers. And natural right actually found its opposite in the historicist outlook that was decayed Christianity, as in Heidegger. The more apparent themes are subordinate to the conflict between reason and revelation, each claiming to be the source of authority, that is of authority in politics, for politics is the sum and enforcer of authority. Is politics divinely ordained or humanly chosen?

In the development of his thought Strauss approaches the theological-political problem through liberalism, and liberalism through the situation of Jews. The liberal state offered Jews the rights of individuals, but it could not protect Jews from discrimination in the private sphere without violating the distinction between public and private that was vital to liberalism. Jews then would have to make their own liberal state through the movement of political Zionism. But how would they remain Jews in a liberal state? Political Zionism would have to become cultural Zionism, adapting Judaism to the individualist culture of liberalism. In the 1920s Strauss vehemently attacked this adaptive Judaism as adulterated and untrue to the tradition it claimed to revive. Tanguay brings out the uncompromising boldness of Strauss's intent to expose the incompatibility of Judaism and modern liberalism that liberalism tries to soften and cover over. Strauss actually hardened the alternative between them, making revelation and reason each claim its due to the fullest extent in irreconcilable opposition to the other.

Here in his early work Strauss made evident the radicalism that was always to characterize his thought and that, contrary to advice from the sage scholars of liberalism, was always to make a forceful appeal to his younger readers. While Sheppard expresses his distaste for "overdetermined conceptual binary oppositions" in Strauss's thought, Tanguay explains why they arise and how they are attractive in times of mugwump liberalism. In any case, to see the situation in Weimar Germany clearly—just as to see our situation today—it was necessary to see the nature of liberalism. And for that, it is necessary to follow out the logic of liberalism as opposed to resting satisfied with the comforting assurances of contemporary liberals, whether in Strauss's time or in ours. Despite Strauss's disdain for these assurances, it should be needless to add, but sadly it isn't, that in his radicalism he was free of the active hatred of liberalism that consumed the totalitarians.

THREE NOTABLE POINTS EMERGE FROM Tanguay's book on Strauss: the stages in his thinking, the "Farabian turn," and the characterization of his "zetetic" philosophy. In describing the stages, Tanguay emphasizes Strauss's formative concern with Judaism in the 1920s, which culminated in the writing of his first book

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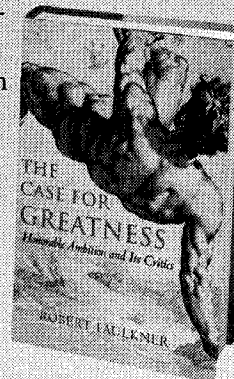
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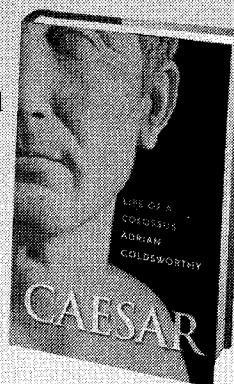
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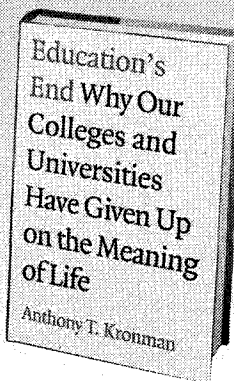
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in 1928 (not published until 1930), *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*. In it Strauss argues that Spinoza merely ridiculed and did not disprove the miracles in the Bible, hence that his strictures against religious prejudice were themselves caused by a prejudice. This was "the prejudice of the positive mind," the Enlightenment's attack on the past so as to prepare for a new society of science and freedom in the future. Although modern science helped in the critique of miracles, the positive mind is more the cause than the consequence of science.

To oppose this triumph of prejudice in the guise of a triumph against prejudice, Strauss conceived the project of a return, a genuine return, to the ancients. But he made the return indirectly through his discoveries in medieval political philosophy. He looked first in Maimonides and then in the Arabs, particularly in Farabi, whose work Maimonides described as "the purest flour." In *Philosophy and Law* (1935), and in his correspondence of the period, Strauss developed the notion of a Medieval Enlightenment free of the positive mind and friendly to both philosophy and religion. Here was Strauss's Farabian turn. Philosophy would not merely patch up a compromise with religion, nor would it simply

dissimulate its atheism because it was true but socially harmful. Instead, Farabi discovered and adopted the figure of the prophet as a *legislator*; thus philosophy came to religion as *political philosophy*. The religious prophet was seen as a legislator of the perfect society, the best regime; his legislation, though not applicable to philosophers, thus not true in the highest case, was necessary to society. It was necessary in politics not only to keep the peace but also to edify, to turn men's souls toward the highest in them. Philosophy would neither submit to revelation nor reject it with contempt; it would accept the veil over reality as part of reality. By this way, and not so much through philosophers' fear of persecution (as indicated by the title of his book *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 1952), was Strauss led to the rediscovery of esoteric teaching. Esoteric teaching is accompanied by exoteric writing; it is not merely the secure conveyance of dangerous truth among philosophers but also requires a noble rhetoric to help one's country live the best life that it can. Strauss developed the argument of his Spinoza book in another direction too, toward the understanding of modernity and liberalism in his studies of Thomas Hobbes (1936) and, later, of Machiavelli (1958).

STRAUSS'S GENUINE PLATONISM WAS zetetic, or skeptical: in Strauss's words, "the evidence of all solutions is necessarily smaller than the evidence of the problems." It understands philosophy as a way of life, the life of inquiry, not as a body of doctrine. Strauss took it upon himself to dissolve the so-called doctrines that scholars had imputed to the ancients: the theory of ideas in Plato, teleology in Aristotle, admiration for Sparta in Xenophon. These were reifications, modernized pseudo-clarities, confections of the positive mind, that ignored the distinction between esoteric teaching and exoteric writing, accepted partisan or dialogic assertion as truth, and lacked all sense of humor. Tanguay calls zetetic philosophy "weak philosophy," meaning philosophy that in the end lacks sufficient truth to refute revelation, its opposite. Weak philosophy, a friendly critic and rival of religion, justifies our love of the perfect and respects the human imperfection that comes with our freedom.

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## MACBETH AND THE MORAL UNIVERSE

*Editors' note: This essay inaugurates the CRB's Locus Classicus feature, in which we review good and great works of the past that continue to compel modern attention. Harry Jaffa's interpretation of Macbeth, published here for the first time, is adapted from a lecture delivered at Hillsdale College in 1974. It was the last of three memorable lectures by him on three great literary murder sagas: Camus's *The Stranger*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The complete lectures will be published by the Claremont Institute.*

**M**ACBETH IS A MORAL PLAY PAR EXCELLENCE. In this, it stands in stark contrast to two more recent well-known tales of murder, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Camus's *The Stranger*. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare presented the moral phenomena in such a way that those who respond to his art must, in some way or another, become better human beings. In Dostoevsky's and Camus's heroic criminals we see the corruption of moral consciousness characteristic of modern literature.

By the art of Camus we are led to admire his hero, Meursault; young people especially tend to identify with him. What kind of hero is Meursault? He is utterly indifferent to morality and cannot understand what others mean when they say they love other human beings. In the story, he kills a man and is sentenced to be executed, in part because he did not weep at his mother's funeral. Meursault becomes passionate in the end: but the only passion he ever experiences is the passionate revulsion against the idea of human attachment. He thinks no one had a right to expect him to weep at his mother's funeral, or for anyone else to weep at her funeral. By Camus's hero we are taught to be repelled by those who (he believes) falsely teach us that there is any foundation for human attachments, or that there is anything in the universe that is lovable. The benign indifference to the universe is the only form of the benign, of goodness itself, in the universe. To imitate the indifference of the universe to good and evil is to live life at its highest level.

In Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov we find a profound articulation of the psychology of the modern revolutionary. Raskolnikov is a more persuasive embodiment of the revolutionary hero than can be found in Proudhon, or in Marx or Lenin. The hero of *Crime and Punishment* is admired for his heroic suffering, and there is something stupendously powerful in Raskolnikov's suffering. We are taught to sympathize and suffer with him. We undergo (in a milder form) the torture that he undergoes as a result both of contemplating and of committing the murder. The reason his suffering

is heroic is that he suffers for the sake of a suffering humanity. He becomes a kind of Christ figure. Unlike Camus's hero, Dostoevsky's hero loves passionately. What is it that he loves? Again, unlike Camus's hero, what he loves above everything is his mother. And of course he is for this reason a much more sympathetic figure, even though he commits a far more brutal crime. But his love for his mother and his sister, and his unwillingness that they suffer the degradation that he thinks circumstances are inflicting upon them, makes him a rebel against the moral order. This drives him to murder a rich pawnbroker, a hateful old woman who is a symbol not merely of a money-grubbing social order but of the Gordian knot which upholds that order. That obstacle—the prohibition of murder—stands between him and a solution of what he sees as at once his personal problem and the problem of all humanity.

The moral order that Raskolnikov violates is represented to us merely and simply as a by-product of Christianity. The ultimate sanction for the prohibition against murder would seem to be incorporated in the ministry of Jesus, which finds its most powerful expression in the story of the raising of Lazarus. The scene in *Crime and Punishment* in which the harlot is compelled by the murderer to read the story is one of the high points in the world's literature. In the scene, Raskolnikov rather scornfully acknowledges the ground of the morality he has violated, but to which he is in some way still committed. Of course, it is clear that he does not believe that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

At the end of the novel, when he is in the process of gaining some kind of redemption, he wonders whether he might some day accept the harlot Sonia's simple faith in the Gospels. The moral order is, as we said, represented to him by Christianity. And he himself is a kind of Christian hero because he shares the compassion for humanity which is presumably the motive of Jesus himself in accepting the sacrifice on the cross. Raskolnikov too suffers on a kind of cross in the tremendous catharsis he undergoes as a result of the murder.

This catharsis takes the form of a series of terrible fevers. Yet he recovers. His crime is not beyond redemption. In fact, it is the necessary cause of his redemption, which would not have been possible before the murder.

Raskolnikov's guilt is uncovered by an examining magistrate who is a kind of detective. This man discovers Raskolnikov's guilt by reading Raskolnikov's essay, which is really a profession of revolutionary faith, and of the right of the hero to destroy a corrupt old order in order to build a better new one. The striking thing about this detective is not so much his cleverness in finding Raskolnikov out and bringing him within the purview of the law. What is striking is that he becomes in a way Raskolnikov's partner. Porfiry is not a minister of vindictive justice. He shows the criminal a way to escape any real penalty for his crime. His ultimate sentence is eight years of penal servitude, under conditions which hardly remind us of the Gulag. He seems to be in some kind of minimum security prison, with Sonia nearby to alleviate whatever of hardship there may be. Porfiry remits all real punishment and shows Raskolnikov the way to a new life, in which his legal punishment is as nothing compared to the suffering he already has undergone in the wake of the murder.

Raskolnikov shares with Meursault the fact that his crime leads in the end, not to a fall, but to an ascent to a higher form of consciousness, to a salvation which would not have been possible had the crime not been committed. There is moreover nothing in Raskolnikov's punishment to discourage anyone—e.g., a Lenin—who may look upon him as the prototype of the revolutionary hero. In *Crime and Punishment*, we see a moral consciousness resembling in decisive respects a messianic Christianity. Such reform of society as may be envisioned has nothing to do with politics, and in fact subsists upon the conviction that salvation consists in direct action—such as murdering an old woman, or a royal family. Napoleon's action in destroying the *ancien régime*, and replacing it with the regime of reason, executing whoever stood in the way, is the tacit model.



## Morality and Politics

WHEN WE TURN TO MACBETH we turn to a world so different that it is hard to identify what it has in common with the worlds of Camus and Dostoevsky. Certainly Christianity is present in *Macbeth* as in *Crime and Punishment*, but it is a Christianity so different that one wonders what it shares except the name. Meursault is perfectly amoral. Whether he is a beast or a god, he is "beyond good and evil," and cannot either love or hate. The priest who tries to console Meursault as he awaits execution he regards as the ultimate alien and the ultimate enemy. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, overflows with passion, and is as intensely alive to moral distinctions as Meursault is dead to them. But Raskolnikov thinks it may be necessary to violate the moral law, perhaps even by committing murder, in order to come into possession of the human good, including the moral good.

Macbeth on the other hand is a man who feels the power of morality to the fullest extent. He does so, I suggest, because he is a political man. By a political man, I understand someone who is a vital part of a political community. For Camus's hero the political community does not exist. For Dostoevsky's hero, it exists only marginally. Raskol-

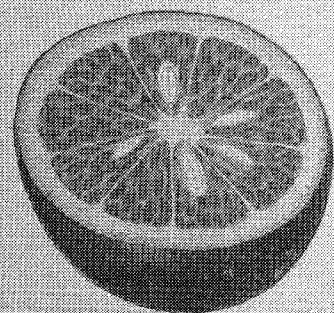
nikov is the model for a revolutionary, whose cause is that of all humanity. His is a polity—like the City of God—that has no borders. Patriotism is not possible however in a world polity ("world polity" is an oxymoron). Patriotism is possible only if there is a connection between one's father and the political order. (In the City of God, God the Father is the father of that city.) In Macbeth's case, patriotism has a literal meaning, as he belongs to the royal family. He murders the king, forcing the king's sons—one of whom is the confirmed heir—to flee. He becomes king—after the murder—by a process of election, but one which is limited to the royal family. When we speak of patriotism we presume a people descended from a common ancestor. The children of Israel are those descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are the original fathers, the founding fathers. In the most patriotic speech in American history, Abraham Lincoln began by saying, "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation..." Now the United States, like other modern nation-states, is not a polity in the original sense of the political: the law of the Constitution makes fellow citizens of those of different ethnicities. The unity of the human race, as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, in Lincoln's poetic evocation, replaces the particular

ancestors of ancient polities with the nature which is the universal ancestor of all human beings.

Lincoln reminds us of the original meaning of citizenship, and invests in our citizenship something of the intensity of that original citizenship. Macbeth as he comes into sight is above all a citizen. As such, he shares responsibility for the commonwealth and, as a citizen-soldier, labors in its service. He feels keenly the honor that accompanies his heroic deeds. In serving the country by serving the king, he is keenly aware of the greatness of the honor that accompanies the person of the king. His ambition is therefore, in its origin, a by-product of his virtue. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* characterizes two of the moral virtues as embodying all the others. One of these encompassing virtues is magnanimity, and the other is legal justice. Legal justice is justice in its most comprehensive form. It is justice as seen from the perspective of the law of the ancient city. Aristotle, reflecting that perspective, says "whatever the law does not command, it forbids." In this he is in full agreement with the Mosaic law.

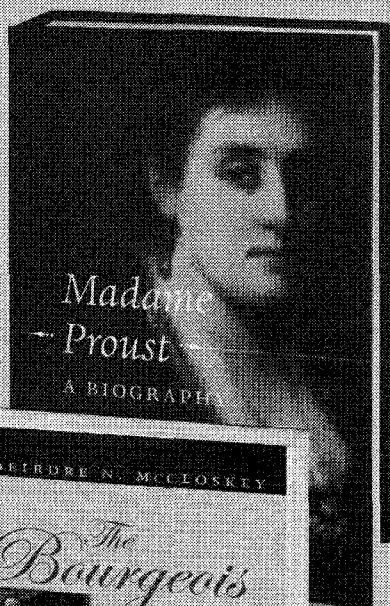
We today would say that "whatever the law does not forbid, it permits." One might think that the difference lies in the permissiveness of our culture. That there is such a difference is undeniable,

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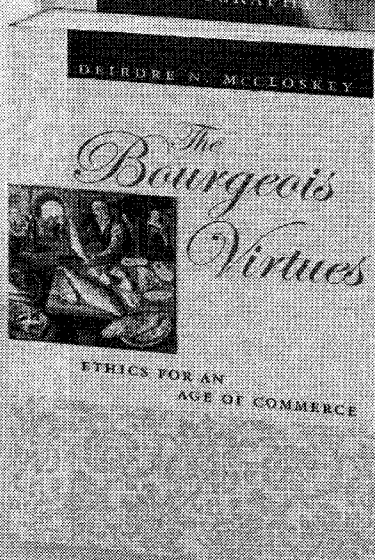
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but its sources go deeper than to our contemporary moral corruptions; and in fact, little, if any, of the difference is due to a changed or lowered conception of human well-being. Aristotle and Moses were agreed in regarding the law as emanating from God or the gods. Their polities were expanded tribal societies, insignificant in size compared to any modern nation-state. In today's polities, any attempt at such comprehensive moral tutelage as we find in the idea of law in the ancient city would result in something like Nazi or Communist tyranny. Yet the moral commands—embodied in the idea of law in the books of Moses and of Aristotle, constitute the negation of tyranny. But what Aristotle calls legal justice, not as a feature of positive law but of moral law, reminds us that we are under an obligation (even if it is no longer legally enforceable) to practice all the virtues.

Whose actions have the widest consequences and are most in need of virtue to direct them? The rulers'. Hence morality in all its dimensions can be best seen in the lives of rulers. Private men or women cannot be moral in the highest degree because they are limited in the scope of their actions. Aristotle quotes the Greek proverb, "Rule shows the man." No one ever knows with certainty how virtuous—or vicious—a man might be until he holds office and has power. Only those in power reveal their real natures. For this reason all Shakespeare's great plays are about rulers: kings and princes and dukes and military commanders. In the Roman plays, these rulers are not kings and princes but great aristocratic warriors like Coriolanus, or great heroes like Julius Caesar, or great soldiers like Mark Antony, who compete among themselves for the rule of the world. Shakespeare's preoccupation is not that of a poet living in an aristocratic age; it is the preoccupation of a moralist who would display human actions on that scale on which alone they can be said to be fully intelligible. Only in a political context can the nature of morality be thoroughly considered. One reason why the works of both Camus and Dostoevsky are deficient in their understanding of morality is their deficiency in understanding politics. Only in a political work in which political actions of the gravest kind are involved can one see the moral phenomena in their fullness.

#### This Bank and Shoal of Time

**M**ACBETH, AT THE BEGINNING, IS A good man. He is a loyal subject, and much more than a loyal subject. He is one who has displayed courage and fidelity in the service of his king and country in a higher degree than anyone else. He is the most honored man, and the most justly honored man in the kingdom. The tragedy of Macbeth is the tragedy of his fall from that high estate. Macbeth reminds us of Milton's Satan, the most glorious of the angels of

heaven, who becomes a fallen angel. We cannot understand the meaning of a fall from virtue if the fall is from a very low position, like that of Meursault. Or even that of Raskolnikov. Although he is lower middle class, Raskolnikov is very proud and thinks himself worthy of great things, but there is nothing to confirm the judgment that he is worthy of the pride he feels. In Macbeth's case we have a man who is certainly proud, but who has demonstrated on the field of battle, in the face of temptation and treachery, that his great pride is justified by his great virtue. And it is his fall that we witness. More than that, we witness the inextricable intertwining of crime and punishment. There is no tincture of salvation resulting from Macbeth's crime—only damnation.

The crime, and the punishment, of Macbeth are inseparable from that of Lady Macbeth. Her fate is not tragic in the sense that his is, because hers is not a fall from grace. She is pure evil at the outset. There is, in her mind, no reason for them not to kill the king. Her invocation of the powers of darkness, when the murder is still in contemplation, is that of a soul already lost to evil. Her punishment, in the end, is different from his, and we must consider in what way it is appropriate to their differences.

Macbeth's soliloquy in act 1, scene 7, is a dialogue with himself on the question of whether to murder the king. All the arguments are against, but one. And that one is so weak as not to merit serious consideration. Yet it will prove to be the one that will prevail, under Lady Macbeth's tutelage.

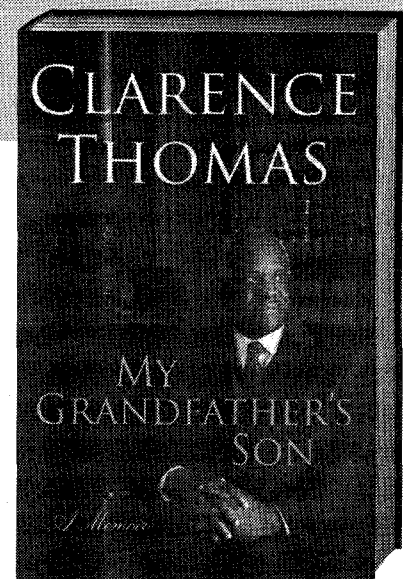
If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly. If th' assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success, that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases  
We still have judgment here, that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague th' inventor. This evenhanded justice  
Commends th' ingredients of our poisoned chalice  
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:  
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued  
against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
And pity, like a naked newborn babe  
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim  
horsed  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye  
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no  
spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other—

#### Enter Lady Macbeth

**T**HIS SOLILOQUY CONSISTS ENTIRELY OF reasons why Macbeth ought not to murder the king. Macbeth reasons truly to a true conclusion. In so doing, he reaches the peak of his moral stature, the point at which the greatest temptation is met and overcome. It provides us, at one and the same time, the height from which the hero falls, and the mystery of why he falls, after such a clear vision of the impossibility of success and the certainty of retribution.

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There are three sets of reasons given, in ascending form. The first is that the murder cannot succeed, because "evenhanded justice" will instruct others to murder the murderer. Those who take up arms against a tyrant will not, like Macbeth, be driven by naked ambition, but by the moral and political necessity to rid themselves of the incubus of tyranny.

Second is the obligation imposed by the moral order, which tells us that it is our duty to protect a kinsman, king, and guest. Implicit is the idea that Macbeth is part of a moral order, to violate which is in some sense to violate himself. Macbeth here understands himself to be, in Aristotle's sense, a social and political animal. His eventual punishment will consist, in part, in his consciousness of his separation from those who have been dear to him, and whose welfare has been intertwined with his own.

Third is the drama, illuminated by Macbeth's powerful imagination, of the moral order personified. Duncan is not only king, he has been a good king, "so clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking-off." The lines which follow are perhaps the most moving in all Shakespeare, in rendering the moral order as a self-subsisting palpable reality, with infinite resources for rewarding friends and punishing enemies. They are followed by the conclusion that he has no motive to commit the murder, only his ambition, "vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself..." That is to say, it is a passion which has no justification beyond itself, a passion at war with reason—certain to be self-defeating.

The soliloquy begins by Macbeth wishing the assassination "could trammel up the consequence." By this he means that if the deed could have no further effects, he would "jump the life to come," that is, ignore the consequences after death. Macbeth believes in heaven, hell, the immortality of the soul, and future rewards and future punishment. Later in the play, when he learns that Fleance has escaped the murderers he has hired, and that Banquo's issue, not his, will occupy the throne of Scotland, he complains bitterly that he has given his "eternal jewel" to the "common enemy of man," and is getting nothing in return. He seems to have expected Satan to keep what Macbeth regarded as Satan's part of the bargain. One might say, Macbeth had to learn the hard way that Satan is not a gentleman. Macbeth does not however actually name Satan (although he does have a servant named Seyton). Nor does he name God. His punishment, as we shall see, is not in his alienation from God, but from beloved human beings.

How can such an overwhelming decision have been so quickly reversed, as it was, by the entrance of Lady Macbeth? Here we must turn to a character as extraordinary as her husband. The meaning of the play must be sought in the comparative anal-

ysis of their divergent and convergent courses. In act 1, scene 5, Lady Macbeth is reading aloud the letter from her husband, in which he tells her of the witches' prophecies, and how, as he "stood, rapt in the wonder," missives came from the king, hailing him Thane of Cawdor. That put him—and her—instantly in mind of the greater hail, of "king that shalt be." Lady Macbeth's soliloquy, which follows, assumes without question that the promised greatness can only be brought to pass by evil means. She does not consider—as we might think she ought—whether the ascent to the throne might not happen by a natural evolution of the political process. This thought must have passed through Macbeth's mind. When he hears Duncan name Malcolm as his successor, he says to himself, "that is a step on which I must fall down or else o'erleap." He must have thought there was some legitimate path to the throne—however remote the possibility—before Malcolm was named Prince of Cumberland. The witches' prophecy did not exclude such possibility and at one point Macbeth says, "If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me without my stir." If Macbeth did not "stir" to become Thane of Cawdor, why might he not await the same dispensation to become king? Why did he not consider that the witches' prophecy was a kind of assurance that, absent other causes, chance would be obliged to make him king? Lady Macbeth will speak of him being crowned by "fate and metaphysical aid." Why do they both assume that this is a sanction for murder, and not the same sufficient cause that made him Thane of Cawdor?

Lady Macbeth drives out of mind any alternative to murder. Here is her thought—after reading the letter—on the task before her:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be  
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy  
nature.  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be  
great,  
Art not without ambition, but without  
The illness should attend it. What thou  
wouldst highly,  
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play  
false,  
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst  
have, great Glamis,  
That which cries "Thus thou must do if  
thou have it;  
And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
Than wishest should be undone." Hie thee  
hither,  
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear  
And chastise with the valor of my tongue  
All that impedes thee from the golden  
round  
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
To have thee crowned withal.

We see that Lady Macbeth anticipates her husband's reluctance and recalcitrance. She fears his nature, which is too full of the milk of human kindness. There is a great deal about both his nature and her nature in the development of the play. She will call on the spirits of darkness to "unsex" her and to come to her woman's breasts and take her milk for gall. Milk is on the side of nature, or is nature, inasmuch as it is—for her—something that must be overcome. In perhaps the most astounding of her rejections of nature, she says

I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks  
me:  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless  
gums  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
as you  
Have done to this.

There is, however, no evidence of such an oath by Macbeth, as she asserts him to have sworn. She repeatedly attributes to him a previous commitment to the murder, which he never made. One wonders why he does not correct her. The soliloquy above in which Macbeth debates the question of the murder in his own mind, coming firmly to a conclusion against it, would make no sense if he had taken such an oath. To whom or to what would he have sworn? A proper oath usually ends, whether explicitly or implicitly, "so help me God." But Macbeth could hardly call on God to help him commit murder. Macbeth later implies that he has given his soul to the "common enemy of man." Satan, he thought, would help him because Satan would by the murder gain possession of Macbeth's soul. But what kind of oath can Lady Macbeth have had in mind when she speaks of swearing as he has done? What could she desire that would justify her in her own mind in murdering the smiling infant at her breast? This question is all the more relevant when we bear in mind that Macbeth wished above all to found a dynasty, and Lady Macbeth would have been an indispensable means to this end. At the moment they have no living children. The thought of murdering the child she once had—which was, incidentally, male—as a means of gaining the crown, is intrinsically inconsistent with his ambition to found a dynasty.

#### The Moral Universe

LADY MACBETH SAYS THAT MACBETH IS NOT without ambition, but lacks the "illness should attend it." This is the only occurrence in Shakespeare of "illness" to mean "capacity for doing evil." That a capacity for evil is an evil capacity is not what Lady Macbeth intends to convey, but Shakespeare conveys it to us nonetheless. That am-



bition "should" be attended by release from moral restraint is a thesis much older than Machiavelli. It is explored in the greatest depth in both Plato's *Republic* and *Gorgias*, wherein Socrates maintains that the worst fate to befall a human being is not to become the victim of a tyrant—terrible as that may be—but to become a tyrant. The soul of the tyrant makes him the enemy of everyone, and the friend of none. Without friends, the life of the tyrant is barren of every good thing that might have tempted him to become a tyrant. But the actions that made him tyrant make it impossible for him safely to relinquish or abandon his tyranny. As Macbeth discovers, once he crosses the threshold of murder, he almost cannot help being driven to commit ever multiplying murders. Every step of his way, after the first murder, drives him further down that path. But he cannot turn back; he has lost the moral freedom which accompanied his first soliloquy, and he is in the grip of a remorseless and relentless necessity. His career of crime can end only in damnation both in this world and the next. The lesson of the play is the inexorable and inescapable vindictive power of the moral universe.

Callicles in the *Gorgias* presents the anti-Socratic thesis that underlies Lady Macbeth's commitment to tyranny and murder. This thesis looks upon morality not as natural but as against nature, as a conspiracy of the weak against the strong, a conspiracy to deprive the strong of the goods that naturally belong to them. This conspiracy begins in early life, when we are taught that sharing (i.e., justice) is good, and that seizing and possessing whatever is within our power to seize and possess is wrong. We are thus led to accept an illusory good, i.e., a reputation for justice, instead of demanding the natural good of dominance and possession. From this perspective, tyranny is the best regime according to nature. It is this understanding of natural right that informs Lady Macbeth's case for the murder. *Macbeth*, in which Macbeth's reasons for rejecting the murder are utterly and completely vindicated, and in which Lady Macbeth's reasons for contradicting them are utterly and completely defeated, is the very perfection of the Socratic case against the Calliclean.

Lady Macbeth says that what Macbeth "wouldst highly" he wouldst also "holily," implying that he renounces the tyrannical role praised by Callicles. She says that he would not play false, and yet would wrongly win. What does this mean? If someone will not play false, how can he wrongly win? The contradiction, as she sees it, is that he does not abandon the end, even as he recoils from the means. Her task, therefore, is to fire his passion for the end so as to overcome his repugnance for the means. She says that he fears to do what must be done, even though he would not wish it undone, if it were done. She will "chastise" with the "valor" of her tongue this weakness, this essential indecision, that impedes him from "the golden

round." The idea of chastisement implies punishment for wrongdoing, and her "valor" a power for good. The moral order appears, in this speech, as an obstruction to Calliclean virtue.

#### All That May Become a Man

THE ACTION OF THE TRAGEDY ORIGINATES from the struggle at the outset between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The murder takes place only because she is victorious in

that struggle. Let us consider how she succeeds. He has concluded the soliloquy presented above. She enters, and he tells her

We will proceed no further in this business.  
He hath honored me of late, and I have  
bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest  
gloss  
Not cast aside so soon.

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She replies:

Was the hope drunk  
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it  
slept since?  
And wakes it now to look so green and pale  
At what it did so freely? From this time  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard  
To be the same in thine own act and valor  
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have  
that  
Which thou esteems't the ornament of life,  
And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"  
Like the poor cat i' th' adage?

Lady Macbeth does not even answer Macbeth's expressed desire to live in the glow of the golden opinions that are deserved tributes for heroic services to king and country. Those opinions, for which Lady Macbeth has nothing but contempt, would have been sufficient for Macbeth to live a happy life. The time will come, after he has lost them forever, when he will realize how sweet they were, and how hollow by comparison is the "mouth-honor" extorted by the tyrant. For Lady Macbeth the just rewards of virtue do not count in comparison to the "ornament of life." Macbeth replies,

Prithce peace.  
I dare do all that may become a man;  
Who dares do more is none.

Lady Macbeth:

What beast was't then  
That made you break this enterprise to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And to be more than what you were, you  
would  
Be so much more the man.

Macbeth says that he dares do all that may become a man, and who dares do more is none. Clearly, they have different and opposing conceptions of what constitutes a man. It was manly of him, she says, to "break this enterprise to me," once again attributing to him an initiative that is really hers. Then, she says, he was a real man, and to go forward with what he had proposed would make him even more a man. To think otherwise is to think that it was not manly, but beastly, to have considered the murder. She invokes, and rejects, the traditional moral distinction between beast, man, and God, which we find in Aristotle's *Politics* as well as in Locke's *Second Treatise* and in the Declaration of Independence.

Macbeth asks, "If we should fail?" Her reply:

We fail?  
But screw your courage to the sticking place  
And we'll not fail.

She then gives her plan to get the two chamberlains who guard the king drunk, and when

...in swinish sleep  
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,  
What cannot you and I perform upon  
Th' unguarded Duncan? What not put  
upon  
His spongy officers, who shall bear the  
guilt  
Of our great quell?

Macbeth now forgets all his own reasoning, abandons all restraint and o'erleaps himself.

Bring forth men-children only!  
For thy undaunted mettle should compose  
Nothing but males. Will it not be received  
When we have marked with blood those  
sleepy two  
Of his own chamber and used their very  
daggers,  
That they have done it?

There is irony in his call for males, when it is the "valor" of her female tongue that has "chastised" his male nature, a nature that she herself has pronounced too full of the milk of human kindness! It is notable that she refers to the murder of the king as a joint enterprise, "What cannot you and I perform..." and "our great quell..." Macbeth's "Bring forth men-children only" seems certainly misplaced, since the man child here could accomplish nothing by himself. We are, however, put in mind of his overwhelming desire to found a dynasty, something that neither he nor any man can do by himself. She has already made his fidelity to the plot to kill the king fidelity to herself: "From this time, such I account thy love...." Later, when the evil consequences have begun to unfold, and he acts to shield her from what she herself has brought on, he calls her "dearest chuck." It is from within their conjugal relationship that the action of the tragedy emanates. It is his passion for his wife that overcomes the reason he otherwise so amply displays. Rejecting the murder would have alienated her; going forward with the murder meant confirming their partnership. Their bond of matrimony would prove the most powerful of the human attachments in the drama.

What are the merits of her arguments against the possibility of failure? These arguments prove in the end to be those very "bloody instructions" which Macbeth had predicted would turn back upon themselves. Her plan is to get the chamberlains who guard the king drunk, so that they cannot protect him. Their drunkenness will then be alleged as an explanation of the murder. How could anyone believe that they could commit murder when in sleep so "swinish" that their "drenched natures" would lie "as in a death"?

She concludes,

Who dares receive it other,  
As we shall make our griefs and clamor roar  
Upon his death?

In the event, they fool no one. Macbeth, sensing this, returns to the scene of the crime and murders both the grooms. The killings of these poor innocents is decisive in turning opinion against him. Lady Macbeth did not, however, expect that their "griefs and clamor" would really succeed. She expected rather that no one would "dare" to openly express disbelief. Lady Macbeth tacitly assumes that when the reins of power are in their hands they can either kill or silence those who would question them. It never occurs to her that the value of the "ornament of life" depends upon how it is gained. To be a king, as distinct from a tyrant, the obedience of the subject must in some sense be voluntary, and not rest upon fear alone.

Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow

WE HAVE SKETCHED THE CAUSES THAT propelled the tragedy. At the beginning, Macbeth's strength, such as it is, lies in the clarity with which he views the moral order and understands his place within it. But his will is not equal to his reason, and her will, aided and abetted by her conjugal power, sweeps away the reason that is in him. The consequence of her victory and of the murder that follows is a transformation in the characters of both of them. As the drama proceeds, he loses the doubt and hesitation he possessed before, and becomes ever more resolute in acting out the multiplying demands of tyranny. Yet even as he loses all restraint, and all conscience, he is punished by his awareness of the goodness of the life he has foresworn. The crown is not, as Lady Macbeth had supposed, an avenue to felicity but to damnation, in this world no less than in the next. There is in the possession of the "golden round" no such consummation as Lady Macbeth assumed there would be when she urged the murder on her reluctant husband. Even as he hardens to the life of crime, she disintegrates. The change from "infirm of purpose, give me the daggers" in act 2, to "Out damned spot! Out, I say!" in act 5, represents, to the best of my knowledge, an unrivalled portrayal of a soul in torment. She had called on the powers of darkness to "unsex her," and had denied nature in its purest form, in envisioning herself as murdering the child at her breast. She had seen the image of her father in the murdered king. We see nature reclaiming its own in the suffering she is compelled to undergo. Her fate contrasts with that of her husband, who goes down fighting, still the warrior.

In the end, his passion for her and for the crown are doomed together. Her death is his ultimate defeat, since it was his partnership with her that was

the ultimate cause of his rejecting his own better judgment, and risking everything rather than be rejected by her.

*Seyton:* The Queen, my lord, is dead.

*Macbeth:* She should have died hereafter,  
There would have been a time for such  
a word.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief  
candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the  
stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

It is paradoxical that this, perhaps the most memorable—and beautiful—passage in the entire drama, is a celebration of despair, of the meaninglessness of life. It is a testament to everything that Macbeth has lost, everything associated with his partnership with Lady Macbeth. Yet at the same time the magic of Shakespeare's celebration is itself a triumph over the very despair it celebrates. It is, in a sense, a vindication of Macbeth himself, a reaffirmation of the greatness of his character before the fall. His fidelity to his wife, although the cause of his fall, nonetheless reminds us of his virtue. There is a non-tyrannical element in his tyranny.

We are reminded, incidentally, that Macbeth's final soliloquy resonates with the many passages in Shakespeare depreciating, and even ridiculing, the acting profession, which was also Shakespeare's. We are also reminded that the actor is the creature of the playwright. Shakespeare was both creator and creature. The images in the souls of the audience are thrice removed from reality. Shakespeare's theater and Plato's cave are closely related. The thesis of *Macbeth* is also the Socratic thesis, set forth especially in the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*, that the worst fate that can befall a human soul, far worse than becoming the victim of a tyrant, is to become a tyrant.

Our analysis has come full circle. Macbeth, like Meursault, ends with "nothing." In the case of the latter, his discovery of the nothingness of the universe and of the idiocy of morality are one and the same. Meursault's discovery is his triumph. Death has no terror for someone for whom life has no meaning, who is not attached to anything in life. The murder—or homicide—he had committed proves in the end to be the fortunate means of the only salvation possible in a dead universe. Macbeth's nothing, by way of contrast, represents the emptying of meaning from a life and world that had been filled to the uttermost with purpose and passion. Lady Macbeth had been the force driving her husband's ambition. It was she who turned his decision not to commit the murder into a decision to commit it. It was she who by the valor of her tongue chastised him into reversing himself. She did so, in part, by declaring that she would take his decision as a measure of his love. The entire tragedy is an emanation of the dynamics of their

conjugal relationship. There is no greater irony than that Macbeth has to commit the murder to prove his fidelity. Yet to play her role as murderess, she calls on the spirits of darkness to "unsex" her. She calls upon the spirits, that is to say, to detach her from the nature from which she derives her conjugal power over her husband. In the end, it is that nature which revenges itself upon her, and condemns her to eternal damnation.

The message—I am tempted to call it the moral—of Macbeth, is the inexorability of the moral order. Macbeth's soliloquy in act 1 tells us with perfect clarity why the murder must fail. The action that follows bears out the truth of that soliloquy. Not only does the plot fail, but neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth is allowed one moment of enjoyment of the fruit of their crime. Their punishment begins almost immediately with the murder. The crime is therefore in every sense self-defeating. The moral order, accordingly, is more powerful than the evil spirits that Lady Macbeth called upon. The moral order, according to *The Stranger* or *Crime and Punishment*, lacks any such power. Both of these works record the declining power of morality in Western civilization, and in this sense they record the decline of the West. Yet Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address reaffirms the same power of morality as *Macbeth*. Perhaps that is why Lincoln said that "nothing equals *Macbeth*."

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Book Review by Anthony Esolen

## LOSS UPON LOSS

*The Aeneid*, by Virgil, translated by Robert Fagles.  
Viking, 496 pages, \$40

*Virgil's Gaze: Nation and Poetry in The Aeneid*, by J.D. Reed.  
Princeton University Press, 240 pages, \$39.50



IMAGINE AN EPIC WHOSE HERO IS DEEPLY devoted to the particular and humble duties of life; to the household gods standing upon the hearth, presiding over a life lived in commemoration of fathers and grandfathers that have gone before. Imagine that this man, "famous for his devotion," must leave behind the greatest loves of his life in submission to a high calling whose fulfillment he knows he will never see. His humanity is not suppressed by these duties but deepened and enlarged through the terrible suffering they entail. Imagine that this hero is drawn by an artist of the most delicate craftsmanship; one who loves his country well enough to see its shame and its glory together, and who attempts, perhaps in vain, to combine a vision of piety for father and fatherland, for the household gods and the great gods, with the poet-philosopher's belief in a natural law that makes the world kin.

That is Virgil's *Aeneid*, a poem that requires of its readers something like the largeness of heart shown by its author and its hero. It has found a most worthy translator in Robert Fagles. And were we not in an age that rewards the academic for divorcing himself from the humble foundation of common sense, the poem might have found a worthy critic in the learned and meticulous J.D. Reed.

The greatest merit of Fagles's translations of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Homer, and now Virgil is the American's deep and powerful humanity, muscling its way through the impedimenta of an ancient language and a buried civilization. Fagles's intense focus on the heart of the poet and his characters is well served by his choice of meter. Whereas other translators of the *Aeneid* have used the stately march of blank verse to render the Latin hexameter roll, as variable and yet as constant as waves of the sea, Fagles prefers instead a generally unmeasured line. Sometimes, to cap a passage, he squeezes a nervous long line back down to blank verse, as in the climax of jilted Dido's curse:

Come rising up from my bones, you avenger  
still unknown,  
to stalk those Trojan settlers, hunt with fire  
and iron,  
now or in time to come, whenever the power  
is yours.  
Shore clash with shore, sea against sea and  
sword  
against sword—this is my curse—war  
between all  
our peoples, all their children, endless war!

And sometimes, for rhetorical power, he will deliberately cut a line short. This is the case near the end of the first movement of Sinon's lie, the speech calculated to persuade the merciful Priam and his Trojans to roll the wooden horse through the gates of the city. Virgil's line and a half are compressed and incantatory:

*miserere laborum  
tantorum, miserere animi non digna ferentis.*  
(Literally, "Have pity on such great labors,  
have pity on a soul suffering what it does not  
deserve.")

Fagles sees that a literal rendering cannot capture the power of Sinon's plea, so he breaks up the meaning of *laborum*, translating it twice; once as "torments" and once as the more generalized and spiritual "pain," using the latter in a short line of summative force and isolating Sinon's unctuous self-justification for the final sentence:

...pity a man whose torment knows no  
bounds.  
Pity me in my pain.  
I know in my soul I don't deserve to suffer.



Most often, though, Fagles uses the long line (and many of them, too; his English lines outnumber the Latin by 10 to 25%, depending on the book) to crowd into the translation every nuance he can. The result is not as swift, perhaps, as the strong blank verse of Robert Fitzgerald, or the more mellifluous verse of Allen Mandelbaum. But its plenitude, its sheer energy, makes the rugged expanse worth the journey. Here is the Sibyl suddenly possessed by the power of Apollo, in the splendid Fitzgerald translation:

But the prophetess  
Whom the bestriding god had not yet  
broken  
Stormed about the cavern, trying to shake  
His influence from her breast, while all the  
more  
He tired her mad jaws, quelled her savage  
heart,  
And tamed her by his pressure.

The image, violent and sexual, is of a dominator breaking a bucking horse. "Bestriding" here is excellent. Though absent from the Latin, it is suggested by the implied metaphor controlling the scene. It is hard to outdo such grand verse, but Fagles's lines rave with the raving of the Sibyl:

But the Sibyl, still not broken in by Apollo,  
storms  
with a wild fury though her cave. And the  
more she tries  
to pitch the great god off her breast, the  
more his bridle  
exhausts her raving lips, overwhelming her  
untamed heart,  
bending her to his will.

Fagles crushes out every drop of juice in the grape: his *wild fury* picks up the orgiastic and feminine intimations of the Latin *bacchatur*; the *bridle*, absent in the Latin, is suggested by the image of wringing and wearying the mouth of an untamed beast. Best of all, to my ear, is the startlingly physical *pitch the great god off her breast*, rendering the Latin *excussisse deum*—more alarming, and more humanly accurate, more sensitive to the plight of the prophetess, than is Fitzgerald's tamer *influence*.

SIMILAR FELICITIES ABOUND THROUGHOUT the work: moments of power, of tenderness, of wonder, of sadness. The glory of the *Aeneid* is not that it shows that Rome and her virtues were the most important things in the world, but that it suggests a Rome both below and beyond the propaganda of the empire of Augustus Caesar. Virgil laments the terrible loss upon which the nation was built; Fagles calls this his "private voice." It is a profoundly religious voice that does not sweep aside the suffering of ally or enemy, and that dares

to dwell upon the strange corners of light and darkness within one human heart. Such is the case when the old Arcadian king, the simply-named Evander (in Greek, "good man"), meets the cortege bringing the body of his only son, Pallas, back home, after he had died bravely fighting on behalf of Aeneas and his men. Virgil not only imagines the grief of the father, but knows too how the father might look upon his son and imagine what he saw, feel what he felt. Evander "throws himself on Pallas, clinging for dear life," then chokes out his lament:

A far cry from the pledge you made your  
father, Pallas,  
that you would do nothing rash the day you  
trusted  
yourself to the savage God of War! How  
well  
I knew the thrill of a boy's first glory in  
arms,  
the heady sweetness of one's first fame in  
battle....

Aeneas too has beheld Pallas on the bier, addressing him as *miserande puer*—brilliantly rendered by Fagles as "child of heartbreak." In a few lines of manly reticence, gratitude, and love, he takes leave of him as a Roman, centuries before there would ever be a Rome:

*nos alias hinc ad lacrimas eadem horrida belli  
fata vocant: salve aeternum mihi, maxime Palla,  
aeternumque vale.*  
The same dark fate of battle commands me  
back  
to other tears. Hail forever, our great Pallas!  
Hail forever and farewell!

The death of Pallas is but one of the many losses bound to Aeneas's fate. We meet him in the midst of a storm at sea, envying the fortune of his old comrades "lucky to die beneath the soaring walls of Troy," to be buried by the hands of loved ones in the soil of home. In that storm he watches one of his ships go down to the bottom, smashed to bits, all hands lost. Having found landfall near a new city, Carthage, he is welcomed by the queen, Dido, who begs him to tell of his suffering, beginning with the fall of Troy. That tale is perhaps the most magnificent and terrible extended passage of poetry in all of Western literature. The Trojans are deceived by their very piety, upon which the Greeks count as they fashion their deception. Then come the rape of Cassandra, the death of her unrequited lover Coroebus, the slaughter of the youth Polites in the penetralia of his father Priam's house, at the sacred hearth, before the eyes of his parents—and the pathetic death of old Priam, slain by the contemptuous son of Achilles:

Well then,  
down you go, a messenger to my father,  
Peleus' son!  
Tell him about my vicious work, how  
Neoptolemus  
degrades his father's name—don't you  
forget.  
Now—die!

SO IT CONTINUES, LOSS UPON LOSS, DEATH upon death. Most of those who die are young and innocent: Aeneas's wife Creusa, lost as they try to escape the burning city; pious Dido, made frantic by love, dead by her own hand after Aeneas leaves her against his will; the faithful helmsman Palinurus, pitched overboard by the malignant gods; the lads Nisus, Euryalus, Pallas, and Lausus, whom Reed calls "Adonis figures," "beautiful, loved, and slain"; the virgin warrior Camilla; and last, Aeneas's final foe in the poem, the noble young Turnus, whom he battles for the hand of the Italian princess Lavinia and thus for eventual lordship over central Italy.

Who or what can justify such losses? With what authority does Aeneas proceed? It is to Virgil's credit that he does not answer with a facile definition of Romanness or even an appeal to the Roman gods. The goodness and wisdom of these latter are always in doubt. Cries Priam, witnessing the desecrating death of his son: "If any power on high recoils at such an outrage"—and the *if* is by no means merely rhetorical. "Hope no more," says the Sibyl to the murdered Palinurus, who in the underworld begs Aeneas to give him a proper burial, "[that] the gods' decrees can be brushed aside by prayer."

With Romanness we are on somewhat surer ground, though even here Virgil does not make things easy. When Aeneas meets his father Anchises in the underworld, the son learns of the valor of his descendants, and, in lines that distinguish the Romans from the artists, philosophers, rhetors, and astronomers of Greece and Persia, he learns that to be Roman is to rule, but to rule in piety:

Others, I have no doubt,  
will forge the bronze to breathe with  
suppler lines,  
draw from the block of marble features  
quick with life,  
plead their cases better, chart with their  
rods the stars  
that climb the sky and foretell the times  
they rise.  
But you, Roman, remember, rule with all  
your power  
the peoples of the earth—these will be  
your arts:  
to put your stamp on the works and  
ways of peace,  
to spare the defeated, break the proud in war.



A noble ideal—but for all of Rome's relative generosity, she will reduce Carthage to a plain sowed with salt and leave Jerusalem in ruins.

Fagles understands these notes of tragedy, this search for a way to justify human suffering, including that portion of it that seems to have been the mortar for building Rome. J.D. Reed, an assistant professor of Greek and Latin at the University of Michigan, understands this too. He sees that to write about an empire like Rome must always involve contradiction. That is because empires by nature cut their moorings to the homeland. Rome's dominion becomes too big for Rome, and her very virtues undo her. Long before Virgil wrote, Roman conservatives had already claimed that the defeated Greeks had had their revenge on the conquerors: Roman fathers hired Greek slaves to teach their sons, and wealthy Romans adopted Greek ways, including a fashionable taste for pederasty. "I fear the Greeks, especially bearing gifts," says the Trojan priest Laocoön. These words describe the ambivalence of Virgil himself, who wrote an epic that revised Homer's originals, reacting against the egoistic glory of Achilles and the cunning of Odysseus; but an epic that could not have existed had the Roman not been sent to school by Homer.

**I**N SHORT, THE POEM RAISES A CENTRAL QUESTION, one with deep implications for the modern West: "Is it possible for a nation to retain its identity in empire?" Closely related to that question is another, less theoretical, but more human and urgent: "What exactly is my duty to my homeland? With what love should I cherish the land of my household gods?" It is to Reed's credit that he sees how often in the *Aeneid* Rome must reach for scraps of self-definition here and there, principally by defining itself as not-Greece, not-Troy, not-Egypt, not-Carthage, and, most problematically, not-effeminate. "There is an emptiness at the geographic heart of identity," he says, assuming what in fact he intends to prove, that Aeneas and the poem resist "the idea of a definitive Roman."

It is meet and just to note that the devoted Aeneas himself will lapse into fury in battle after the death of Pallas, uncomfortably resembling both the hated Greek Achilles and the raving and love-lorn Dido. Virgil compels us to see that all men and women are prey to *dira cupido*, dreadful desire. Reed goes much further, however. Seeing that Roman, Greek, and Carthaginian are but human, he

denies all meaning to "Roman" and deconstructs Roman identity accordingly.

How can one win against a deconstructing critic, learned and cold to the end? If one expands Roman *pietas* to include mercy broadly conceived, a duty to the alien based upon our common and fragile humanity, then the critic will claim that the word "Roman" falls apart. If, on the other hand, one rejects all other cultures as having nothing to do with one's own, then, along with being a third-rate poet and thinker and man, one must hear that one's culture so doggedly served is really nothing but an inverted reflection of those others: the football player is a drag queen in disguise. If one notices, with a manly and paternal tenderness, the beauty of the youth dead on the battlefield—the smooth flesh, the down on the chin—then one must hear the strains of homoeroticism. If one does not notice such things, then one is heartless and inhuman—or is secretly homoerotic anyway.

Reed is an excellent interweaver of citations. He seems to have photographic recall of every metaphor ever penned in Hellenistic literature. His elucidation of the tangled ethnographies of peoples and cities of the ancient world is admirably precise. And he is correct to note the ironies that Virgil has built into his foundational epic—especially that the Romans seem to depart from the characteristics of the perfumed, long-haired Trojans they are supposed to be. Certainly, too, he is right to point out the strange openness or flexibility of Aeneas, who can adopt the point of view of anyone he meets, including, in the end, his enemy Turnus. Reed emphasizes that the imperial gaze (and by extension "Virgil's gaze") "is in fact receptive," concealing "a perpetual give-and-take between commander and commanded."

**B**UT CONSIDER, FOR EXAMPLE, THE POEM'S terrible climax. Aeneas has defeated Turnus in single combat; and Turnus is but a lad, a heroic young man who represents, in part, the greatness of the peoples who will unite with the Trojans, whose customs indeed will triumph over the Trojans, as together they form the Roman race. He lies wounded before the conqueror, and now, like the Trojan Hector long before him, he makes a plea. Turnus asks, not that his body be returned to his father, but that, as a hope against hope, he be returned alive, having surrendered in full sight of the Trojans and his own Rutulians. Here the poet has led his hero to an impasse. That *anima naturaliter christiana*, that naturally Christian

soul, as Tertullian called Virgil, is now calling upon a merely natural virtue, *pietas*, to do what it cannot. It can sometimes, not always, battle impiety and emerge unstained. But how can piety battle piety?

Why should the young man die? Into the mind of Aeneas surge thoughts of Priam and the slain Hector, of his own father Anchises, the human being to whom his heart was closest; of other suppliants he has spared; and of the young men he has seen die too soon. He wants to spare Turnus; but that is a dangerous prospect for the Trojans. Then he sees upon Turnus the belt of Pallas, whom Turnus had slain. He remembers his love for the youth, and his promise to that other old man, the father Evander. Piety here pulls him in both directions, and Aeneas, in a rage, fulfills his final horrible duty:

Decked in the spoils  
you stripped from one I loved—escape my  
clutches? Never—  
Pallas strikes this blow, Pallas sacrifices you  
now,  
makes you pay the price with your own  
guilty blood!"  
In the same breath, blazing with wrath he  
plants  
his iron sword hilt-deep in his enemy's  
heart.  
Turnus' limbs went limp in the chill of  
death.  
His life breath fled with a groan of outrage  
down to the shades below.

Is this climax the melding, finally, of Aeneas's private feelings and his public responsibility, as Fagles in his essay suggests? Or is it the failure, honestly revealed by the poet, of a virtue that is true and holy but ultimately incomplete—the best that the pagan Roman world had to offer, but unable to deliver its promise of peace? Reed, busy comparing Turnus with Adonis, princess Lavinia, and Aphrodite, busy bending genders and scoffing at the patriotic, does not even bother to ask. In a better world he would have, and might have done it well. Like many these days who study the humanities, he's interested in irony—not humanity, and certainly not divinity.

Anthony Esolen is professor of English at Providence College and author of *Ironies of Faith: The Laughter at the Heart of Christian Literature* (ISI Books).



Essay by Stanley Kurtz

## TRIBES OF TERROR



**L**ORD CURZON, BRITAIN'S VICEROY OF INDIA and foreign secretary during the initial decades of the 20th century, once declared:

No patchwork scheme—and all our present recent schemes...are mere patchwork—will settle the Waziristan problem. Not until the military steam-roller has passed over the country from end to end, will there be peace. But I do not want to be the person to start that machine.

Nowadays, this region of what is today north-west Pakistan is variously called "Al-Qaedaistan," "Talibanistan," or more properly, the "Islamic Emirate of Waziristan." Pakistan gave up South Waziristan to the Taliban in Spring 2006, after taking heavy casualties in a failed four-year campaign to consolidate control of this fierce tribal region. By the fall, Pakistan had effectively abandoned North Waziristan. The nominal truce—actually closer to a surrender—was signed in a soccer stadium, beneath al-Qaeda's black flag. Having recovered the safe haven once denied them by America's invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and the Taliban have gathered the diaspora of the worldwide Islamist revolution into Waziristan. Slipping to safety from Tora Bora, Osama bin Laden himself almost certainly escaped across its border. Now Muslim punjabis who fight the Indian army in Kashmir, Chechen opponents of Russia, and many more Islamist terror groups congregate, recuperate, train, and confer in Waziristan. This past fall's terror plotters in Germany and

### Books by Akbar S. Ahmed discussed in this essay:

*Resistance and Control in Pakistan: Revised Edition.* Routledge, 206 pages, \$145 (cloth), \$39.95 (paper)

*Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World.* Polity Press, 224 pages, \$59.95 (cloth), \$21.95 (paper)

*Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization.* Brookings Institution Press, 300 pages, \$28.95

Denmark allegedly trained in Waziristan, as did those who hoped to hijack transatlantic planes leaving from Britain's Heathrow Airport in 2006. The crimson currents flowing across what Samuel Huntington once famously dubbed "Islam's bloody borders" now seem to emanate from Waziristan. Slowly but surely, the Islamic Emirate's writ is pushing beyond Waziristan itself, to encompass other sections of Pakistan's mountainous tribal regions—thereby fueling the ongoing insurgency across the border in Afghanistan. With a third of Pakistanis in a recent poll expressing favorable views of al-Qaeda, and 49% registering favorable opinions of local jihadi terror groups, the Islamic Emirate of Waziristan may yet conquer Pakistan. Fear of a widening Islamist rebellion in this nuclear-armed state was General Mushar-

raf's stated reason for the recent imposition of a state of emergency. And in fact Osama bin Laden publicly called for the overthrow of Musharraf's government this past September. It is for fear of provoking such a disastrous revolt that we have so far dared not loose the American military steam-roller in Waziristan. When Lord Curzon hesitated to start up the British military machine, he was revolving in his mind the costs and consequences of the great 1857 Indian "Mutiny" and of an 1894 jihadist revolt in South Waziristan. Surely, Curzon would have appreciated our dilemma today.

### An Indispensable Guide

**F**OREIGN JOURNALISTS ARE NOW BANNED IN Waziristan and most local reporters have fled in fear for their lives. Because scholars have long neglected this famously inhospitable region, Waziristan remains a dark spot, and America remains proportionately ignorant of the forces we confront in the terror war. Yet an extraordinary if neglected window onto the inner workings of life in Waziristan does exist—a modern book, with deep roots in the area's colonial past. The British solution in Waziristan was to rule indirectly, through sympathetic tribal *maliks* (elders), who received preferred treatment and financial support. By treaty and tradition, the laws of what was then British India governed only 100 yards on either side of Waziristan's main roads. Beyond that, the *maliks* and tribal custom ruled. Yet Britain did post a representative in Waziristan, a "political agent" or "P.A.," whose headquarters

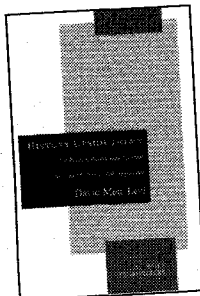


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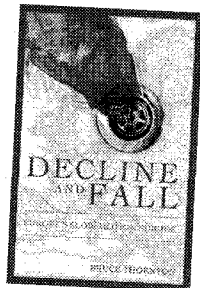
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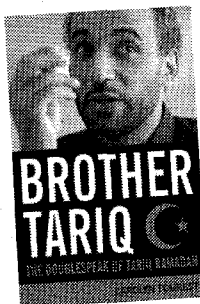
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was protected by an elite military force, and who enjoyed extraordinary powers to reward cooperative maliks and to punish offenders. The political agent was authorized to arrest and jail the male kin of miscreants on the run (particularly important given the organization of Waziristan's tribes around male descent groups). And in special cases, the political agent could blockade and even destroy entire settlements. After achieving independence in 1947, Pakistan followed this British scheme, indirectly governing its many tribal “agencies” and posting P.A.s who enjoyed the same extraordinary powers as under the British. Akbar Ahmed, a British-trained social anthropologist, served as Pakistan's P.A. in South Waziristan from 1978 through 1980. Drawing on his academic background and political experience, he has written a fascinating book about his days as “king” (as the tribesmen used to call the political agent). First published in 1983 under the title *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society*, the book was reissued in 1991, and revised and released again in 2004, each time under the title *Resistance and Control in Pakistan*. Its obscure title and conventional academic introductory chapters explain why it has been neglected. Yet that neglect is a serious mistake. Given Waziristan's new-found status as the haven and headquarters of America's global enemies, Ahmed's book is an indispensable guide to thinking through the past and anticipating the future of the war on terror. In addition to shedding new and unexpected light on the origins of the Taliban, *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* offers what is, in effect, a philosophy of rule in Muslim tribal societies—a conception of government that has direct relevance to our struggle to stabilize Iraq. Since completing the book, Ahmed, a devout Muslim who holds a chair in Islamic Studies and is a professor of International Relations at American University, has gone on to write several works analyzing the dilemmas of the Islamic world and explaining Muslim perspectives to Westerners. These include *Islam Under Siege* (2003), and his recently published *Journey Into Islam*. For a time, he served as the High Commissioner of Pakistan to Great Britain, and in a note at the end of *Journey Into Islam*, he says that he coined the term “Islamophobia” shortly after taking that post.

Having once been tasked with governing the most notoriously unruly tribes in the Muslim world, Ahmed never entirely embraces the politically fashionable line. More than his academic colleagues in Middle East studies, he acknowledges the contribution of tribalism's violence and traditionalism to the Middle East's contemporary dilemmas. In fact, the story of the “king” of Waziristan's transformation into the man who coined the term “Islamophobia” reveals some extraordinary tensions and tragedies lurking beneath our polarized political debates.

## Under Siege

THE FIRST THING THAT STRIKES THE reader of *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* is the pervasive nature of political violence in South Waziristan. And here, in contrast to his later work, Ahmed himself is at pains to emphasize the point. A popular novelist of the British Raj called Waziristan tribesmen “physically the hardest people on earth.” British officers considered them among the finest fighters in the world. During the 1930s Waziristan's troublesome tribesmen forced the British to station more troops in that agency than in the remainder of the Indian subcontinent. In more settled agricultural areas of Pakistan's tribal Northwest Frontier Province, Ahmed says, adults, children, and soldiers mill about comfortably in the open, while women help their men in the fields. No guns are visible. But arid Waziristan is a collection of silent, fortress-like settlements. Women are invisible, men carry guns, and desolation rules the countryside. Even in ordinary times, from the British era through the present, the political agent's headquarters at Wana in South Waziristan wears the air of a fortress under perpetual siege. Five British political agents died in Waziristan. Ahmed reports that during a visit to Wana by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1976, the entourage of Pakistan's prime minister was kept nervously awake most of the night by machine gun and rifle fire from the surrounding hills. In short, the Wana encampment in South Waziristan seems like nothing so much as a century-old version of Baghdad's Green Zone.

Politics in Waziristan is inseparable from violence. A British official once called firing on government officers the local “equivalent for presenting a petition.” Sniping, explosions on government property, and kidnappings are common enough to necessitate continuous military protection for political officials. And the forms of routinized political violence extend well beyond direct attacks on government personnel. Because government allowances are directed to tribal elders who control violent trouble-makers in their own ranks, ambitious maliks have reason to insure that such outlaws do in fact emerge. Waziristan's many “Robin Hoods,” who make careers out of kidnapping even non-government officials and holding them for ransom, are simultaneously encouraged and controlled by local maliks. This double game allows the clans to profit from their own capacity for causing trouble, while also establishing a violence valve, so to speak, through which they can periodically convey displeasure with the administration. “To create a problem, control it, and terminate it is an acknowledged and highly regarded yardstick of political skill,” writes Ahmed. For the most part, income in Waziristan is derived from “political activity such as raiding settled districts” and “allowances from the administration



for good behavior." Unfortunately, a people who petitions by sniper fire seems poorly suited to democratic citizenship.

In his later work, Ahmed's insight into the subtle choreography of tribal violence dissolves in a haze of cultural apologetics. In *Islam Under Siege*, for example, he argues that Americans misunderstand what they see when Afghan tribesmen fire rifles into the sky, or store ammunition and weapons in caves. Although Americans associate these actions with terrorism, Ahmed calmly explains that firing into the sky is simply a mark of celebration at birth and marriage. Weapons storage, he reassures his readers, is merely "insurance against tribal rivalries." But is there not some connection between the resort to terror tactics, on the one hand, and societies characterized by violent tribal rivalry and demonstrative gunfire, on the other?

### Tribal Society

THE CONNECTION ARISES FROM THE way Middle Eastern tribes are organized. These tribes are giant lineages, traced from male ancestors, which sub-divide into tribal segments, which in turn divide into clans, sub-clans, and so on, down to families, in which cousins may be pitted against cousins, or brother against brother. Traditionally existing outside the police powers of the state, Middle Eastern tribes keep order through a complex balance of power between these ever-fusing and -dividing ancestral groups. (Anthropologists call such tribes "segmentary lineages.") In such tribes, the central institution is the feud. Absent state policing, security depends on the willingness of every adult male in a given family, clan, tribe, etc., to take up arms in its defense. An attack on a lineage-mate must be avenged by the entire group. Likewise, any lineage member is liable to be killed for an offense committed by a relative, just as all lineage members would collectively share in compensation should peace be made (through, say, a tribal council or the mediation of a holy man). Tribal feuding and segmentation allow society to keep a rough (sometimes very rough) peace in the absence of a state. Conversely, societies with strong tribal components tend to have weak states. A powerful code of honor ties the system together. Among the Pushtun tribes that populate Waziristan and much of Afghanistan, that code is called "Pushtunwali." Avenging lineage honor is only one aspect of Pushtunwali. The code also mandates that hospitality and sanctuary be provided to any stranger requesting them. Thus a means is provided whereby, in the absence of a state, zones of security are established for travelers. Yet the system is based on an ever-shifting balance of terror which turns friends into enemies, and back again into friends, in a heartbeat. And this ethos of honor writes violent re-

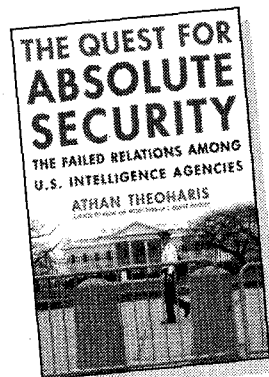
venge and collective guilt deep into the cultural psyche. Although the British political agents who learned to live with Pushtunwali generally lionized it, Winston Churchill condemned it as a "system of ethics, which regards treachery and violence as virtues rather than vices." In any case, the dynamics of the war on terror are easily recognizable as an extension of this tribal system of collective guilt, honor, humiliation, and revenge.

### A Symbol of Honor

THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO Ahmed's term as South Waziristan's P.A. saw the rise and seeming collapse of an Islamist rebellion that, in retrospect, clearly stands as a precursor to the Taliban. Led by a mullah named Noor Muhammad, the movement was crushed by Pakistan's army in 1976. Armed with documentary resources, including access to the personal diary of Noor Muhammad, Ahmed takes us through the riveting story of this uprising. On the one hand, the mullah's rebellion was classically Islamist. He established a traditional *madrasah* (religious school) in South Waziristan, whose students, or *talibs* (whence the word "Taliban"), were among the rebellion's core supporters. He criticized Pakistan's government for failing to adopt Islamic law, forbade the use of "un-Islamic" innovations, like the radio, and had violators of his various prohibitions beaten. Yet these familiar Islamist features were built upon a tribal foundation. The mullah's ascent was due, in part, to his ability to mediate tribal feuds. South Waziristan is populated by two major tribes, the Wazirs and the Mahsuds. (A century ago the Mahsuds were part of the Wazirs, but have since split off and gained their own identity.) The Mahsuds traditionally outnumbered the Wazirs and were at least relatively more integrated into modern society. After Pakistan gained independence in 1947, a few Mahsuds moved to "settled areas" and entered school. Many of these made their way into government service, thus connecting the Mahsuds to influential bureaucratic networks. Others started businesses, which brought a modern source of wealth to the tribe. Noor Muhammad's ability to resolve tribal feuds at a time when the Wazirs felt intense humiliation in the face of rising Mahsud power and wealth, turned him into a symbol of Wazir honor. Under the mullah's leadership, the Wazirs effectively declared a jihad against both the government of Pakistan and the Mahsuds, demanding a separate tribal agency for themselves. Properly speaking, of course, a jihad can only be fought against non-Muslims. The mullah solved this problem by declaring the Mahsuds to be infidels—a tribe of toadies to an un-Islamic Pakistani regime—who had sold out their Wazir cousins for government allowances and debased modern ways. Of course, this accusation

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of infidelity is exactly how al-Qaeda and the Taliban justify their attacks on fellow Muslims today. Notice, too, that Noor Muhammad's movement developed in the early '70s, well before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The rise of the Taliban is often ascribed to "blowback" from CIA support of Pakistani Islamists who fought the Soviets in the 1980s. Ahmed's account shows that simplistic "blame America" theories cannot hold. Critics of the blowback argument rightly note that America had no other means of fighting the Soviet invasion than to work through the Pakistani government, which for its own reasons needed to deploy Islamist proxies. (Supporting Pushtun nationalist proxies, the only other option, would have played into the hands of those in Afghanistan and India seeking to dismember Pakistan.) The problem is that this entire debate passes over the deeper social sources of the contemporary Islamist ascendancy. Ahmed argues that the mullah's insurrection was "generated by Muslim actors as a result of internal tensions in society." And at one level, this proto-Taliban movement was deeply traditional. Mullah-led tribal rebellions have a long history, not only in Waziristan but in Muslim society as a whole. The great 14th-century philosopher-sociologist Ibn Khaldun famously described a cyclical process in which, unified by a righteous

mullah, fierce outlying tribes conquer an effete and corrupt state. Over time the new set of ruling tribesmen falls into luxury, disunity, and corruption, and is in turn overthrown by another coalition of the righteous. These rebellions generally fuse an Islamic aspect with some narrower tribal interest, and the Wazirs' jihad against an allegedly "infidel" rival tribe certainly fits the bill. There may be at least something new under that harsh Waziristan sun, however. Modernity's manifold economic opportunities seem to supercharge traditional tribal resentment at substantial disparities of wealth and status. And paradoxically, modern wealth also subverts such shallow internal tribal hierarchies as once existed, with explosive results.

### Cultural Self-Defense

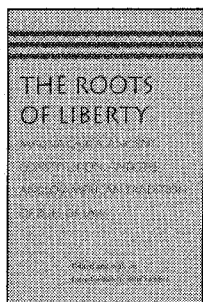
**F**OLLOWING THE OIL BOOM OF THE 1970S, Wazirs and Mahsuds alike migrated to the Persian Gulf to work the oil fields and send their remittances back home. Maliks from the most prestigious tribal lineages initially resisted the call of migration. So the oil boom created an opening that "depressed lineages" happily filled. By the time the maliks began to send their sons to the Gulf, intra-tribal disparities of wealth and influence were disappearing.

So while the Mahsuds had outpaced the Wazirs, the power of maliks was waning among the Wazirs themselves. Now the Wazirs could afford to throw off those pliant elders who had taken and distributed British and later the Pakistan government's pelf; and by supporting a radical mullah, the restive tribe could feed its resentment of both the government and the Mahsuds. As Ahmed notes, and in pointed contrast to the "poverty theory" of Islamism, modern education and wealth seem to have sparked this early Islamist rebellion. Instead of spurring further development, economic opportunities have fed the traditionalist reaction. Waziristan's tribesmen understand full well that their rulers mean to transform their way of life, thereby "taming" them through the seductions of education and modern forms of wealth. While some have accepted the trade, the majority consciously reject it. During the colonial period, education was despised as an infidel plot. In the 1970s conservative tribesmen systematically destroyed electrical poles, which were seen as a threat to Waziristan's isolation and therefore to the survival of traditional Pushtun culture. Economic development might well "tame" these tribesmen, yet poverty is less the cause of their warlike ways than the result of a deliberate decision to preserve their traditional way of life—their Pushtun honor—even at material cost. The Islamist revolution is a conscious choice—an act of cultural self-defense against the intrusions and seductions of an alien world. Although the social foundations of the traditional Muslim way of life have been shaken, they are far from broken. So long as these social foundations cohere, advancing globalization will provoke more rebellion, not less—whatever America decides to do in Iraq and beyond. The root of the problem is neither domestic poverty nor American foreign policy, but the tension between Muslim social life and globalizing modernity itself.

### Islam or Tribalism?

**I**N A SENSE, WE ARE THE MAHSUDS. THE Wazirs ached with humiliation at the loss of their dominance. Their grudge against the Mahsuds stemmed far more from Waziri decline than from any specific complaint. Even as the Mahsuds were scapegoated for the Wazirs' diminishment, America and the West have been blamed for worldwide Muslim decline. Addressing Muslim "grievances" won't solve this problem, because the professed grievances didn't start the jihad to begin with. Ahmed is clearly embarrassed by the Wazirs' intra-Muslim jihad against the Mahsuds. Fore-shadowing his later apologetics, he is at pains to distinguish between "authentic" Islam and Noor Muhammad's seemingly bogus claim of Mahsud infidelity—a claim obviously rooted in

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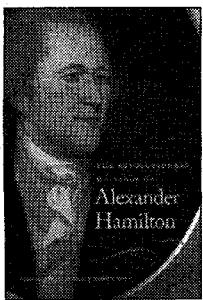


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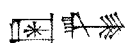


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narrow tribal rivalry and interest. In his recent work, Ahmed puts much of what seems warlike or problematic in traditional Muslim society into the "tribal" basket, segregating out a supposedly pure and peaceful Islam. There is some justification for this procedure. Middle Eastern conceptions of honor, marriage practices, female seclusion, revenge, and much else can fairly be understood as practices with tribal roots, rather than formal Islamic commandments. Reformist Muslims therefore make a point of separating the tribal dross from authentic Islamic teachings. Yet there is clearly some sort of "elective affinity" between Islam, in the strict sense, and tribal social life. The two levels interact and interpenetrate, leaving the boundaries undefined. Push-tuns who set out to avenge purely personal offences will dress and scent themselves as if embarking on jihad. So a given theologian's "true" Islam is one thing; "actual existing" Islam on the ground is another. Noor Muhammad's jihad against Muslims he judged to be infidels turns out to be representative of the new religious wave, and reflects a complex and long-standing Muslim synthesis between theology and tribalism. Nor was the mullah's accusation of Mahsud infidelity without resonance. He accurately identified the modernist thread that united his immediate tribal enemies, the developing state of Pakistan, and ultimately the West itself.

#### Rediscovering Classic Strategies

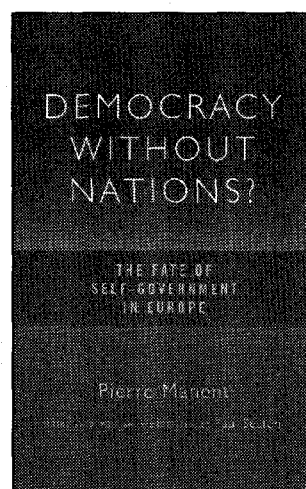
IF ISLAMIST REBELLION AND NARROW TRIBAL interest are difficult to disentangle, the opportunity to separate them is the key to America's sophisticated new counterinsurgency strategy (actually a rediscovery of classic British and Pakistani strategies for dealing with Muslim tribes). Inveterate Wazir/Mahsud rivalry was the single greatest weakness of the tribes throughout the British era in Waziristan. The British ignored tribal feuding when the stakes were small. Yet if one tribe seemed at risk of gaining a permanent upper hand, the Brits intervened to keep opponents more-or-less equally at each other's throats. And since nearly every clan trouble-maker has rival kin, the P.A. cultivated multiple factions, so as to play one off against the other. Under Pakistan, the tribes have sometimes turned this game against the government, playing a sympathetic official (often a fellow Pashtun) against a rival administrator. America's new counter-insurgency strategy seeks to appeal to tribal interests, as a way of breaking the link between al-Qaeda's global jihad and its erstwhile Sunni allies in Iraq. So far the new strategy has helped to stabilize Anbar and other rebellious tribal regions in Iraq. The danger is that the tribal winds will shift, and our military will likely come under constant pressure to favor one tribal faction or another. If mishandled, this could drive less fa-

vored clans back into enemy hands. Tribal politics can be mastered, yet it requires a constant presence. And learning to play the tribal game is very different from establishing a genuine democracy, which would mean transcending the game itself. Can America or Pakistan adopt this new strategy in Waziristan itself—breaking the link between al-Qaeda and the tribal coalition now united against us in jihad? Theoretically this is possible, yet the outlook is far from ideal. Al-Qaeda has already murdered many of Waziristan's maliks. (Mullah Noor Muhammad rose to power in the '70s on assassination threats and violence against traditional maliks.) Insofar as economic and educational change has penetrated Pakistan's tribal areas, it seems to have undercut the basis for creating a new generation of government-friendly maliks, and fed into a populist Islamist revolt instead. Nevertheless, there are unconfirmed reports that America and Pakistan are even now exploiting latent tensions between al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Waziristan. In the 1970s, once Noor Muhammad's combination Islamist rebellion/tribal war got out of hand, Pakistan was forced to crush it. The army bulldozed Wana's thriving traditional market, turning the Wazirs' most important trading center into

little more than freshly plowed ground. Tipped off, the mullah took to the hills. Employing tactics reminiscent of Britain's original P.A.s, Pakistan seized his followers' property and systematically blew up their homes and encampments. After three months of this, the disheveled mullah and his followers came down from the hills and surrendered. Nowadays, burning a thriving Waziristan marketplace to the ground and blowing up civilian settlements as ways of getting to Osama bin Laden would doubtless elicit global howls of protest. Yet far from the glare of international publicity, Pakistan once freely employed such tactics.

#### Sunny Conclusions

WHEN, A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER the destruction of Wana's market, Ahmed took over as P.A., the defeated Wazirs were looking to restore their lost honor and prove their loyalty to Pakistan. Trained as an anthropologist and convinced he could use the Pushtun's code of honor to good effect, he decided to give the Wazirs their chance. Breaking with established agency precedents, he placed his own life at risk by taking regular eve-



#### DEMOCRACY WITHOUT NATIONS? *The Fate of Self-Government in Europe* by PIERRE MANENT

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"This book shows how democracy weakens itself almost to the point of disappearing when it forgets its own history and neglects the conditions that made it possible. But, Pierre Manent adds, the external world—which doesn't share our angelicism—summons us to exist, reminding us that Europe will condemn itself if it persists in its current self-denial, the chief symbol of which is the denial of its substantial relationship to Christianity."—*L'Express*

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ning strolls around Wana without bodyguards. Ahmed could easily have been kidnapped and held in exchange for the imprisoned mullah's release, but the Wazirs left him untouched. Ahmed then visited the Wazirs' holiest shrine, on the far border with Afghanistan—territory where no P.A. had ever set foot. As a guest of the Wazirs, he once again staked his own life and honor on the Pushtunwali of his Wazir hosts. In this way, he both pacified the Wazirs and extended Pakistan's writ in Waziristan further than it had ever gone. He even managed to coax a number of the region's storied "Robin Hoods" into surrender. Based on these impressive successes, Ahmed concludes in his book that despite their reputation for violence and double-dealing, tribesmen can be peaceably governed within the terms of their own code of honor, if only they are given the chance. He regards solving tribal problems through military action as a sign of failure. Unfortunately, despite his considerable insight, his optimistic conclusions far outrun the terms of his own account. Ahmed was the consummate good cop, in the right place at the right time. His ability to use the Pushtunwali code to evoke the best in the Wazirs clearly depended upon the army's violent actions in Wana two years before. Even the cross-border miscreants talked into surrender were balancing the refuge and respect he promised against the substantial dangers of living under the Soviets, who had entered Afghanistan during Ahmed's term. The former P.A. acknowledges some of this in passing, yet his unrelievedly sunny conclusions about tribal governance don't begin to acknowledge the depth of his own dependence on Soviet and Pakistani bad cops for success. His account has much to teach us. The honor code can indeed serve to offset and minimize tribal violence, and that effect can be encouraged by wise rule. But taken alone, Ahmed's analysis and prescriptions are dangerously misleading and incomplete. The thesis of his next book, *Islam Under Siege*, was an extension of the analysis presented in *Resistance and Control in Pakistan*. The Muslim world as a whole is suffering from a loss of dignity and honor, Ahmed argues. As mass-scale urbanization, uneven economic development, migration, and demographic expansion undercut traditional social forms, the Muslim response has been to resist these changes and interpret them as outrages against collective honor. His solution was for the West to accept, support, and ally with traditional Muslim society, thereby helping the Islamic world to recapture its lost sense of honor.

### The Aligarh Model

AHMED'S LATEST BOOK, *JOURNEY INTO Islam*, is riven by tensions between the author's public battle against "Islamophobia" and his reluctant acknowledgment that the Islamist ascendancy might be worth fearing after all. *Journey Into Islam* is based on Ahmed's recent travels across the global Muslim community, and he bills this tour of the Muslim world (with American students in tow) as an "anthropological excursion." Yet constant coverage of his entourage in Middle Eastern media outlets likely gentled his interviewees' responses. Pictures of Ahmed and his smiling American students posing with friendly Muslims get the central message across. Unless one desperately wants to be persuaded that all is well, however, his reassurances fall flat. The book's Panglossian facade is broken by a single, searingly powerful moment. Ahmed's entourage visited Aligarh University in India, expecting to rediscover an academic beacon of Anglo-liberalism that had long and famously spread democratic values throughout India and Pakistan. Aligarh University shaped Ahmed himself in his youth, allowing him to synthesize his pride in Islam with a genuinely liberal and modern sensibility. Yet moments after entering the Aligarh University campus, Ahmed and his American companions were surrounded by furious Muslim students praising bin Laden and raging at President George W. Bush. Students came even closer to descending into mob violence here, at India's erstwhile bastion of Muslim liberalism, than they had during Ahmed's visit to Deoband, the acknowledged center of South Asian Islamism. This frightening, unexpected encounter at his beloved alma mater was clearly agonizing for Ahmed, and forced him to acknowledge the collapse of the "Aligarh model" of liberal Islam. "The nation-state and the Aligarh model are not a viable alternative in the Muslim world at present," he concedes sadly. This is indeed a tragedy. Ahmed himself embodies another side of the Aligarh model's fate in today's world. Modern and liberal though he may be, he is unwilling to concede the need for fundamental reform within Islam. Instead of facing the evident incompatibility with modernity of core aspects of Muslim religious and social life, he reverts to sanitized accounts, accusations of Islamophobia, and complaints about American foreign policy. Although he bitterly resents the influence of Bernard Lewis on American conservatives, Ahmed periodically (and reluctantly) mimics Lewis's claim that Americans are being scapegoated for the Muslim world's

own decline. Lewis's conviction that the use of force must be a key aspect of American foreign policy in the Middle East infuriates Ahmed. Yet, rightly understood, his own account in *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* confirms Lewis's insight. Without the destruction of the Wana market and the capture of Noor Muhammad, not to mention the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Ahmed's gentle, honor-based rule in Waziristan would not have been possible.

### Long-term Struggle

IN A SENSE, GLOBAL ISLAM IS NOW WAZIRISTAN writ large. Ahmed rightly spots tribal themes of honor and solidarity throughout the Muslim world—even in places where tribal social organization per se has receded. Literally and figuratively, Waziristan now seeks to awaken the tribal jihadist side of the global Muslim soul. This has effectively thrust the leaders of the Western world into the role of British and Pakistani P.A.s (a famously exhausting job, Ahmed reminds us). With technological advance having placed once-distant threats at our doorstep, the West may soon resemble South Waziristan's perpetually besieged encampment at Wana. Perhaps it already does. Yet Waziristan was ruled indirectly, without ordinary law or policing. Preventing terror plots and the development of weapons of mass destruction requires a more active hand. Muslim society will have to reform far more profoundly than Akbar Ahmed concedes if the worst is to be avoided. Our best option may be to reintroduce somehow the Aligarh University tradition of liberal learning and merit-based employment (independent of kinship ties) to the Muslim world. With our strategy in Iraq now reinforcing tribalism, the obvious front to try this is Europe, where concerted efforts must be made to assimilate Muslims to Western values. Globalization might then work for us, as cultural changes bounce back to the Middle East. Even in the best case, we face a long-term struggle. Simmering tensions between modernity and Muslim social life are coming to a head. Yet all our present recent schemes are patchwork. And someday, perhaps at the peak of a post-emergency civil war between the army and the Islamists in Pakistan, the military steamroller may be called upon to settle the Waziristan problem once and for all. Who knows if, even then, it will work.

Stanley Kurtz is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

*Attendant Cruelties: Nation and Nationalism in American History*, by Patrice Higonnet. Other Press, 384 pages, \$29.95

Patrice Higonnet praises American inclusion and open-mindedness, reminding us there has always been a strong link between “progressive America” and “forward-minded Europe”; but he laments that this inclusive strand in American life is overshadowed by an “exclusionary nationalism” based on messianic religiosity, rampant individualism, and violent militarism. For centuries this unholy trinity has justified wars of excessive cruelty against enemies perceived as evil, whether Indians, Southerners, Japanese, Germans, or Muslims.

Higonnet, Harvard’s Goelet Professor of French History, condemns Presidents Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and William McKinley as “war criminals.” Although Abraham Lincoln was “humane,” Higonnet wonders why he supported General Ulysses S. Grant “without regard for the frightful murderous suffering inflicted” upon his troops, or why Lincoln did not stop General William T. Sherman as he “ravaged the South.” The author is critical even of those modern American liberals who advocate “soft power.” They are simply cultural imperialists, seeking American hegemony by other means.

The most sinister figure of all in this shoddy book’s indictment is George W. Bush, who “seized on the idea of a ‘War on Terror’ in order to realize his dream of a softly fascist America.” The author’s conspiracy theory includes the usual cast of characters: the “military-industrial complex,” “the subterranean work of the so-called Jewish lobby,” and the sinister “influence of the neo-conservatives.” Many of the latter were students of Leo Strauss, “a German racial refugee,” as Higonnet calls him bizarrely. Strauss’s neocon disciples “replicated the thought of Sayyid Qutb, the first theoretician of Islamism,” Higonnet claims, seeking not simply to “neutralize” their opponents but to “eliminate” them. And on and on he goes, giving new meaning to the term “a Harvard education.”

—John Fonte  
Hudson Institute

*A Well-Regulated Militia: The Founding Fathers and the Origins of Gun Control in America*, by Saul Cornell. Oxford University Press, 288 pages, \$30

American liberals used to claim that the Second Amendment’s “right to bear arms” is a collective right, belonging to states rather than individuals. But during the 1980s this argument crumbled under the weight of new scholarship, some of it by liberals, questioning why “the people” should be read so differently from the rights invoked in the First, Fourth, Ninth, and Tenth Amendments. The movement to ban guns was left to search for new legal and scholarly ground for its propositions.

Saul Cornell, a history professor at Ohio State University and the director of the John Glenn Institute’s Second Amendment Research Center, is one of the leading advocates of what has been called the “militia-conditioned individual right” theory. In *A Well-Regulated Militia*, he argues that a purely individual right to private arms never existed at the time of the American Founding, but neither did the collective right that liberals used to swoon over. Both, he contends, emerged during the 19th century, and a careful reading of the Second Amendment reveals instead a hybrid “civic right,” with arms ownership practically limited to those participating in “a well-regulated militia” and subject to inspection and regulation. With this, Cornell offers today’s policymakers a third way, the better to help the nation “move forward” on the gun debate—though gun owners know through hard experience to batten the hatches when they hear such talk.

By attempting, in effect, to backdate the origins of gun control into the early republic, the author sidesteps the difference between the benign regulations of that time and the more aggressive restrictions of the 20th century. Despite his attempt to claim the middle ground, Cornell still ends up with policy proposals—new federal gun taxes to “allow society to shift part of the cost of gun violence back to those gun owners who do not act responsibly,” and mandatory insurance for gun owners—that have been standard fare among gun control enthusiasts for years. But his book gives American liberals a new vocabulary to use in pursuit of gun restrictions.

—Daniel C. Palm  
Azusa Pacific University

*Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment*, by Bryan Garsten. Harvard University Press, 290 pages, \$45

Bryan Garsten, an assistant professor of political science at Yale, argues “that a politics of persuasion—in which people try to change one another’s minds by appealing not only to reason but also to passions and sometimes even to prejudices—is a mode of politics that is worth defending.”

Although all men are rational some of the time, no man is rational all of the time. Persuasion, therefore, requires “linking our position to [the] existing opinions and emotions” of other people. In one sense, then, rhetorical speech is fundamentally democratic, consisting “partly in ruling and partly in following.”

Early chapters on Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant demonstrate that liberalism contains an anti-rhetorical tendency rooted in the distrust of democratic judgment. Later chapters on Aristotle and Cicero (perhaps the two greatest teachers of rhetoric) provide an alternative view, one that the author argues is more appropriate for a regime such as ours.

Successfully weaving a beautiful—not merely a functional—civic cloth from people’s passions and opinions, emotions and interests, requires more than skill in the art of rhetoric, to be sure. “Sensitivity to existing opinions can easily become capitulation to unjust prejudices,” a danger that points to the need for statesmanship. Though Garsten neglects the particular principles that ought to guide the statesman, he shows why a politics of persuasion is both necessary and proper for our deliberative democracy.

—Murray S. Y. Bessette  
Claremont, CA





Book Review by F. Carolyn Graglia

## FOR THE CHILDREN

*Marriage and Caste in America: Separate and Unequal Families in a Post-Marital Age*,  
by Kay S. Hymowitz. Ivan R. Dee, 192 pages, \$22.50 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper)

*The Future of Marriage*, by David Blankenhorn.  
Encounter Books, 260 pages, \$25.95



OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES, AMERICAN adults have seemed more concerned with enjoying their own existence than with the generation and welfare of children. Kay Hymowitz's *Marriage and Caste in America* and David Blankenhorn's *The Future of Marriage* address the consequences of this failure to attend to nature's scheme. The first book compiles Hymowitz's essays, most of them previously published in the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*. Without footnotes or bibliography, it is less a resource for studying the issues than a lively discussion of the family today, which may appeal to those who are part of the problem but could be part of its solution.

Hymowitz contends that marriage's separation from reproduction and its redefinition as a "state-stamped intimate relationship between two adults"—the work of the feminist movement and the sexual revolution—has made children "incidental," no longer the focus of a union devoted to their rearing. Yet there is a vast divide between the educated middle-class women who are more likely to marry before bearing children and the less educated, frequently black, women who constitute the bulk of single-parent families. Hymowitz tells us that "children of single mothers are less successful on just about every measure than children growing

up with their married parents regardless of their income, race, or education levels: they are more prone to drug and alcohol abuse, to crime, and to school failure; they are less likely to graduate from college; they are more likely to have children at a young age, and more likely to do so when they are unmarried."

Soaring divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births (37% of U.S. births are illegitimate) have made ours a nation of separate and unequal families. On one side is the middle-class woman following a life script of schooling and preparation for work, leading to self-sufficiency, then marriage, and only then children. On the other is the lower-class, less educated woman for whom sex, babies, and life just happen. "Children in the top quartile," Hymowitz explains,

have mothers who not only are likely to be married but also are older, more mature, better educated, and nearly three times as likely to be employed (whether full-or part-time) as are mothers of children in the bottom quartile. And not only do top-quartile children have what are likely to be more effective mothers; they also get the benefit of more time and money from their live-in fathers.

This is the same two-family nation examined in James Q. Wilson's *The Marriage Problem* (2002, a work Hymowitz might have mentioned); Wilson depicts America, in Disraeli's famous words, as two nations that are "ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."

BUT IS THE PICTURE SO ROSY FOR CHILDREN on the upper side of the divide? In our no-fault divorce culture, these children, although born to married parents, often end up being raised by a single parent. In fact, the propensity to divorce is apparently correlated with two-income families; Hymowitz notes that "traditional families, with breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wife, had the lowest rate of divorce." Women employed 80% of the time since the birth of their first child are twice as likely to be divorced as stay-at-home moms are.

In her essays "Dads in the 'Hood" and "The Teen Mommy Track," Hymowitz gives little hope for the renewal of a marriage culture on the inner-city side of the divide. The poor black men she describes are "neither searching for, nor expecting, durable companionship with the opposite sex." One adolescent explains: "I just can't see myself being with one woman." But these young men do want children insofar as they provide status as

proof of manhood, even though most inner-city dads come around with diapers and money only occasionally. Four years after giving birth, 80% of young single mothers are no longer romantically involved with their child's father, who has often moved on to other women and babies. Compounding these mothers' dilemma is the fact, noted by James Wilson, that "educated, affluent African-American men are no more likely to marry than their poorer counterparts."

The "baby mamas" of the hip-hop song ("cause nowadays it's like a badge of honor / to be a baby mama") cannot be explained by the lack of sex education, says Hymowitz. The cultural mores socializing these girls include early sexual experience and motherhood, but not marriage. One pregnant 14-year-old explains: "All my friends have babies. I was beginning to wonder what was wrong with me that I didn't have one too." These words reflect a subculture which, "unlike elite culture, values motherhood over career achievement," Hymowitz writes. But she concedes that "nothing could be more natural than a sixteen-year-old having a baby"—commonplace especially among African-Americans, though up until the 1960s young mothers were usually married.

The urge to reproduce is hard-wired into most living beings. There is merit in what Rutgers professor of anthropology Lionel Tiger asserts in his book *The Decline of Males* that these girls are choosing Darwinian reproduction over Marxist market production. "I am unwilling," he says, "to accept the notion on face value that having a baby is less valuable than acquiring a law degree or a small business. It is not self-evidently better to become a lawyer than a mother." Perhaps some of the women who followed the feminist script would agree with Tiger insofar as they enjoy market success but face an ever-diminishing chance of marrying and bearing children. In her essay "The End of Herstory," Hymowitz observes that "there are no Feminists in the throes of fertility anxiety" and that an increasing number of mothers are opting out of the workplace to return home. The older career woman, who sacrificed her marital and maternal prospects, and the baby mama in the 'hood, each responded to the message of her subculture. But both the baby mama and the single woman who uses a sperm donor to achieve motherhood are acting selfishly, treating babies as commodities to satisfy their own needs while denying them a marital home with two biological parents.

Revival of a marriage culture depends on convincing women on both sides of the divide that marriage should precede childbirth and that children need their biological fathers at home. This culture would re-stigmatize illegitimacy, reform divorce laws, and enforce mores that uphold sexual intercourse as the reward of marriage. Citing evidence of disgust with the sexual revolution and the determination of children victimized by divorce to

do better than their parents, Hymowitz concludes that Americans are now "earnestly knitting up their unraveled culture."

**F**OR THOSE ENDEAVORING TO PROTECT traditional marriage, David Blankenhorn's *The Future of Marriage* is an invaluable resource. The founder and president of the Institute for American Values, Blankenhorn is a forceful critic of the divorce culture. He analyzed the disastrous effects of fathers' departure from the home in *Fatherless America* (1995). Now, he addresses same-sex marriage, thoroughly weighing the arguments on both sides. A self-identified Democrat and liberal who has frequently debated same-sex marriage advocates, Blankenhorn expresses concern—even anguish—at opposing their demands. He does so because he believes that to grant them would destroy marriage as a public institution dedicated to the production and rearing of children by their two biological parents.

Analyzing the historical record, Blankenhorn describes the origins, purpose, decline, and attempted recovery of marriage, and he demonstrates that the institution will be further damaged if same-sex marriage is made legal. While same-sex marriage advocates focus on the needs of adult homosexuals, Blankenhorn focuses on children:

What children need most are mothers and fathers. Not caregivers. Not parent-like adults. Not even 'parents.' What a child wants and needs more than anything else are the mother and the father who together made the child, who love the child, and who love each other.

To be sure, heterosexuals eroded this ideal, converting 1950s marriage culture into 1970s divorce culture. Today, more than 40% of all first marriages end in divorce (the rates for second and third marriages are even higher), and more than half of all U.S. children will spend "at least a significant part of their childhood living apart from their father." But redefining marriage to include same-sex couples, Blankenhorn argues, "would eliminate entirely in law, and weaken still further in culture, the basic idea of a mother and a father for every child," the precise purpose for which marriage was created. Same-sex marriage advocates deny this, arguing that sex and children are not at the heart of marriage, which they redefine as simply "a commitment between two people" in an "intimate, caring relationship." This definition, says Blankenhorn, is "wildly inadequate." He demonstrates that marriage developed as an institution in all human societies "to bridge the sexual divide, facilitate group living, and carry out reproduction." Essentially, "marriage is socially approved sexual intercourse between a woman and a man" within a relationship structured so that "any

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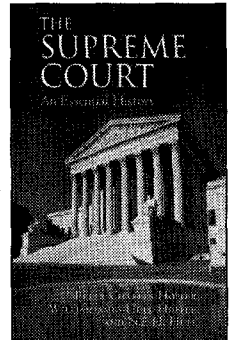
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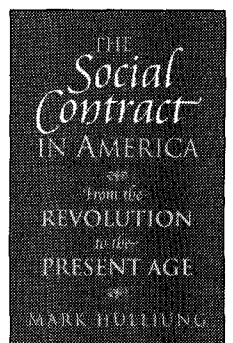
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children resulting from the union are...emotionally, morally, practically, and legally affiliated with both of the parents."

Blankenhorn analyzes, for example, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the story of the institutionalization of marriage in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar (1870–1860 B.C.), one-third of which concern marriage and reproduction. He presents a wealth of material from philosophy, anthropology, and evolutionary biology and psychology to show that "without children, marriage as institution makes little sense." Some of his sources naturally stand out. John Locke, writing in his *Two Treatises of Government* that God "put strong desires of Copulation into the Constitution of Men, thereby to continue the race of Mankind," defined marriage as "a voluntary Compact between Man and Woman," consisting of "a Communion and Right in one another's Bodies, as is necessary to its chief end, Procreation" and calling on them to unite their care and affection towards their common offspring, "who have a right to be nourished and maintained by them, till they are able to provide for themselves." Anthropologist Helen Fisher puts it succinctly: "People wed primarily to reproduce." Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founders of anthropology, established that in every culture there is "the rule of legitimacy," requiring a father and a mother for every child; "in all human societies...the group consisting of a woman and her offspring is not a sociologically complete unit." "The human family," says Malinowski, "must consist of the male as well as the female," and because the "father is defined socially," "in order that there may be fatherhood there must be marriage."

Because the human infant remains immature and dependent for many years, notes Blankenhorn, helping the infant grow "into a flourishing human being is the most difficult, time-consuming,

and important work of our species." Human evolutionary adaptation met the infant's need for constant care through biological innovations (e.g., unusually large male penises and female orgasm, with its accompanying release of the bonding hormone oxytocin) to make sexual intercourse more enjoyable and "bind together the man and the woman who make and raise the child."

THE MATERIAL BLANKENHORN AMASSES establishes that far from a private relationship to satisfy adult needs, marriage is a social institution to meet social needs. Against this argument the case for same-sex marriage cannot stand. Same-sex marriage advocates' crucial contention is that marriage will secure "social endorsement" for the homosexual couple. As Andrew Sullivan puts it, "only marriage" will assure the homosexual that "his love has dignity, that he does indeed have a future as a full and equal part of the human race." But, replies Blankenhorn, accepting same-sex marriage means accepting same-sex parenthood, by whatever means a child is acquired. This will deny the child the very benefit marriage was instituted to confer on him. Blankenhorn characterizes Sullivan's argument as "reeking of narcissism" and demanding that "we worry less about children and more about adults."

*The Future of Marriage* does not predict the outcome of the same-sex marriage debate. Some developments do favor traditional marriage: divorce rates have declined slightly; 59% of adults believe it should be made harder to divorce; teenage pregnancy rates have declined significantly; and an increasing number of mothers are leaving the workplace to raise children at home. This last development indicates that some women are rejecting the feminist ideology that gave same-sex marriage its plausibility. But is this enough to make it implausible? Surveys show

that younger members of the population are most supportive of same-sex marriage. This is unsurprising. As children, they were indoctrinated to be politically correct, non-judgmental, and accepting of the feminist teaching that there are no important differences between the sexes. Although they believe that divorce hurts children, many reject the importance of child-rearing by both father and mother, perhaps because they grew up knowing many single-parent families and two-income families.

Blankenhorn himself bows to political correctness in using the female pronoun as a general referent. Why would the author of *Fatherless America* adopt this academic conceit and patronize the feminist belief in ongoing female oppression? He knows that our problem is to fortify the declining male, not the ascending female. Young women, who graduate from college at much higher rates than men and earn more than men in our largest cities, do not need to have the female pronoun waved in support of their cause.

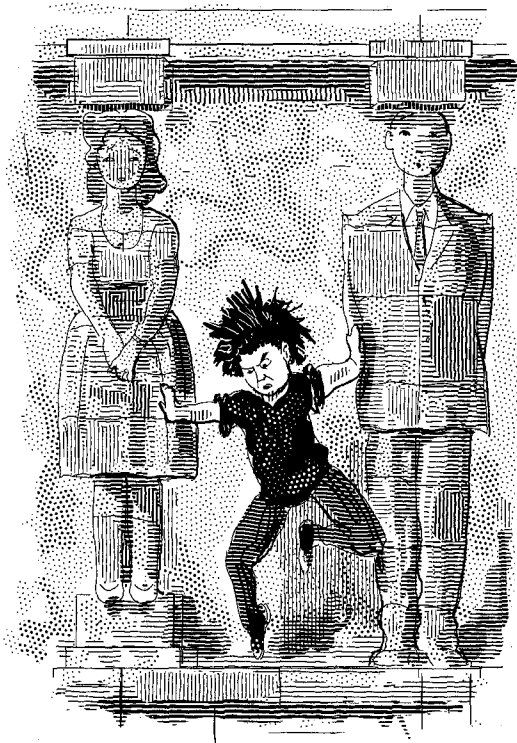
Blankenhorn opposes same-sex marriage reluctantly. His diffidence is suggested by phrases like "Dear Reader" and "Gentle Reader," which almost beg the audience to indulge a dubious narrator. His work, based on vast research and compelling analysis, needs no indulgence. He seeks it perhaps because he believes that "gay marriage would reaffirm society's commitment to social justice and equal treatment under the law." He fears, then, that he is arguing for a denial of equal justice. He is not. Refusing a benefit to those who lack the qualifications for receiving it is not a denial of equal treatment, and Blankenhorn demonstrates beyond doubt that homosexuals are unqualified for the defining duties of marriage.

F. Carolyn Graglia is the author of *Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism* (Spence Publishing).

Book Review by Midge Decter

## GROWING UP AMERICAN

*The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization,*  
by Diana West. St. Martin's Press, 272 pages, \$23.95



ONE DAY IN THE MID-1960S I OPENED an issue of one of the then supposedly "hot" literary magazines and came upon an article written by a young man who was either still in, or perhaps just out of, college. I no longer remember why that piece was included in the magazine—whether, say, as part of a symposium of some kind or whether solely by virtue of its alleged literary merit—but I have never forgotten what its author said, for it provided my somewhat premature introduction to what would nearly a decade further on come to be celebrated in song and story simply as The Sixties (though it would, of course, also include a goodly part of the '70s). To me the most memorable part of the article was taken up with a description of the daily life of its author's father, who, it was announced in a tone of horror, got up every day and dutifully went to work at the same old soul-killing job for no better reason than to provide his family with what seemed to be his idea of a good life, namely, a safe and comfortable house to live in, good food to eat, a good school for the children, and decent neighbors. The young man then concluded by saying that if he ever came to believe that he himself might some day be consigned to such a life, he would prefer to slit his throat.

*Slit his throat*—the young man's exact words. It would be gratifying to be able to say that in

that moment I could foresee the full extent of the chaos that was about to settle on a generation of the country's most benignly bred and tenderly treated children, but in fact that would take some time (and as the parent of daughters then approaching their teens, no doubt some contribution to that chaos on my own oh-so-enlightened part). Although far from free myself of the sin of generational arrogance back in those years, the only word for what I felt about that young author was fury. Had it never occurred to him, I fumed, that maybe his father was living as he lived not by some socially perverted choice but out of love, precisely, for him?

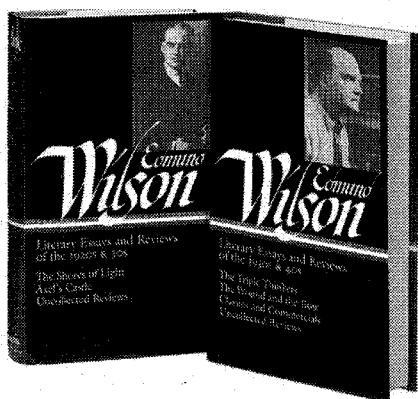
In any case, and whatever my personal feelings toward him, there was no missing the significance of that privileged young man's belief that he would rather be dead than accept the responsibility of providing a safe and comfortable life for a child of his own. Such an idea would, indeed, be a not-so-hidden factor behind a good deal—if not indeed all—of the soon-to-explode student radicalism, not to speak of that other, literal form of declaring oneself non-responsible, namely, "dropping out" (which turned out to mean not much more than living on charity, whether from a government otherwise declared to be illegitimate or from one's as yet fortunately unsuicidal check-writing father).

AS THINGS TURNED OUT, OF COURSE, there proved to be a whole lot of ruin in this nation—not to speak of in that ungrateful young man's generation. And since by the same token there was in the end minimal, if any, economic consequence—either to the famous "kids" or to the country—from what proved after all to be only a temporary refusal to get into proper harness, our young author very likely did in the end find himself a job—or better yet, a high-powered career—and perhaps even, throat intact, got himself dragged into making a reasonably comfortable home for a child or two.

But if the economic impact of those youthful disruptions that came so indulgently (and falsely) to be associated with the vicissitudes of the Vietnam War was in the end minimal, their cultural consequence was, of course, enormous. For not only were they tolerated, but in the eyes of significant numbers of the society's acknowledged educational, spiritual, psychiatric, and legal authorities they were to be accorded high—in some cases the very highest—moral and spiritual kudos. The "kids" took to the streets, trashed their schools, committed arson in university libraries... and were thereby declared the finest and brightest the world had yet seen. Even the ever more casual and commonplace use of illegal drugs, if not exactly honored, was at least brought into the zone



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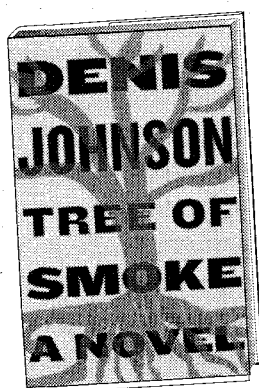
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of social comfort by being set on a moral par with the parental consumption of alcohol. And as for sex, what is there to say? A generation and more of seekers after psychoanalytic enlightenment had succeeded in "freeing" the children to float around adrift in the stuff, where the only safe course open to them—little men, little women—was to arrange for themselves an ever less satisfactory series of ersatz monogamies. (It is difficult to believe that the explosion of resentment against men on the part of ordinary young women that began sometime in the 1970s, and the answering, though perhaps more private, explosion of resentment against women on the part of ordinary young men, had nothing to do with the unnatural impositions they placed on one another in what should have been their dreaming and scheming teen years.)

Be that as it may, and whatever the scarring of its tissue that must inevitably have been involved in its ultimate surrender to the everyday, this was a generation whose formative experience was that of being praised to the skies by those in command of its future and being at the same time uniquely unreserved about praising itself.

As for the author of that offending article, the number of years that have passed since it was published would indicate that he is now, at least figuratively, a grandfather. His children, whatever the advantages or lack of same provided for their growing up, are now doing well—certainly by comparison with the overwhelming majority of mankind and even by comparison with society's only somewhat tardily realized expectations for them. And his grandchildren? They are growing up in a world whose possibilities for comfort and health and entertainment and enrichment would even only two generations earlier have seemed at the border of the unimaginable.

**Y**ET ALAS, SAYS DIANA WEST IN HER NEW book, these are *not* the luckiest children in the history of the world. On the contrary, they are the most neglected and abandoned. Moreover, their abandonment is not only proving to be dangerous, in some cases mortally so, for the children themselves but is, as the book's subtitle has it, having no less an effect than that of "bringing down Western civilization" itself.

Now, as we know, subtitles are often composed by publishers, or at least arrived at in cooperation with their books' authors, in order to provide a bit of easily visible provocation to the passing book buyer. And as we also know, Western civilization has survived—sometimes shakily and in much need of repair but also sometimes in what can only be called glory—such brutalities as, to mention only a few, war, slavery, bloody revolution, fratricide, and genocide. Still, there is no question that in certain relatively new respects the condition of Western culture is at this moment far, far from robust. Thus though it does, happily, seem

way too extreme to do something as brash and bad tempered as sound the death knell of so long-lived and so various—and yes, so benign—a civilization as that responsible for the creation of the United States of America, there is without any question much reason to be concerned about the condition of the country's most privileged children and their parents. (Or perhaps one should say there is *still*, after more than 40 years, much reason to be concerned about the condition of the country's most privileged children and their parents.) And that, title and subtitle notwithstanding, is both the real subject of this book and the source of its author's sometimes almost palpable anxiety.

A columnist for the *Washington Times*, Diana West is a writer with a keen eye for the salient detail, an equally keen wit, a truly lively pen, and a hearty appetite for bad news. She is also, it seems, a mother, still young enough to find herself, or so the reader might surmise, moving through what might just be the thorniest of all the thickets of motherhood—that of bringing one's offspring ever closer to adulthood. This, though referred to somewhat obliquely here and there in the book, does at any rate seem to add something to the tone of urgency with which she levels her indictment at her contemporaries.

Her thesis, illustrated with a full range of anecdotes culled mainly from the heartland of the American upper middle class, is that the moral and social abandonment of America's offspring by their parents is leading not only to the children's own downfall but to the downfall of Western civilization itself. And given the evidence she has collected, not to speak of the mountain of similar evidence available to just about any observer who takes only a bit of trouble, there is more than enough reason to be worried. That girls and boys who are of an age to be shuffling around anxiously eyeing one another from opposite sides of the room, for instance, are now meeting in corners instead for a bit of ho-hum fellatio, while perhaps not technically criminal enough to send anyone to jail, is surely a crime against the nature of those girls and, I would say, against that of the boys as well. Or that children who are not old enough to vote are allowed by parents, whether absent or present, to throw themselves parties at which they drink the night away—again, while perhaps not a prosecutable offense—is surely to be accounted a crime against them. And that parents look away when their children give evidence of being zonked on drugs more than surely ranks as a crime against them. And as for the rest of the parental indulgences under which their children's minds and souls are being buried, these serve at once as the youngsters' training in the need to have a great deal of money and simultaneously as a deterrent to the ambition to learn how to earn it. All this and more, in carefully collected examples, constitutes the major part of Diana West's indictment.

And finally, if, as she so persuasively illustrates, the parents of these children cannot bear the image of themselves as people whose obligation is to exercise parental authority in the face of resistance, what can be said of school officials, who have long since abdicated just about every right to make a rule or impose a demand? It is ironic, and, of course, far, far worse than ironic, that America's once-undreamed of energy and the wealth it has produced should have turned out to be so fertile a ground for the intellectual and social (and sexual) enervation of the country's most advantaged children.

**N**OW, BEING A CONSCIENTIOUS OBSERVER, Diana West provides an account of the generation on whose behalf she is so angry that is bound to leave a reader deeply worried about what the future can possibly hold in store for them. And there is even more to be said about their condition: for instance, that thanks to science and technology these children will now grow up virtually free of illness and pain and physical travail. This means not only that they will have had little experience of, and little or no tolerance for, difficulty but that they will almost certainly on average live longer than, say, their grandparents. Which in turn means, in effect, that they are at a point, socially as well as spiritually speaking, far less along in life than, say, the boys of the same age who once readied themselves to march off to fight in World War II and the girls who waited for them to return. How this will all play out one day we do not in fact know, but even if Diana West's reporting turns out to provide only a partial account, at this point there seems little question that

many if not most members of the generation of today's children will be forced to grow up, socially and emotionally speaking, with one hand tied behind their backs.

But "downfall" and "death"? Granted, they may not make a pretty or ennobling sight when these children arrive at the point where they might be expected to take their place in the world. But then it was also a far from pretty sight when their parents, the fabled "kids" of the '60s, arrived there as well. The country paid a heavy cultural price for that, to be sure: among many other things, there was the startlingly rapid wreckage of the American university and all that it portended for the intellectual condition of its allegedly best and brightest. The point is, however, that this country and its culture, both of which are no longer nearly so young and tender and breakable as some of their despairing critics seem to think, have by now come through, and survived, a great deal. Some of it has been ugly in a way that we can hardly any longer imagine: the Civil War, to take the admittedly cruelest example, in which 620,000 people were killed at a time when the country's entire population was only a little more than 30 million and from whose deepest bitterness the country would not really emerge for nearly a century. Or, to take a far less cosmic but not altogether inconsequential example, there was the wave of crime, including murders in the street, and the political corruption it engendered—not to speak of the open flouting of the law on the part of hundreds of thousands of the country's most worldly-wise citizens—brought on by the 18th Amendment to the Constitution. (This phenomenon has in recent years been set in its place as a source of truly excellent cinematic en-

tertainment, but surely a Diana West of the 1920s might have declared with what would have seemed full justice that the moral and cultural skies were falling.)

**T**HE UNITED STATES IS BOTH A LARGE AND various and—what is hardly unimportant—very, very lucky place. It is lucky in its great size, its location, its variety—whether geographic or economic or social—and above all in the genius of the men who undertook to secure its founding. It has perhaps, but only perhaps, seen better times, morally speaking, than the present. It has surely seen worse ones. And if those who should be its most fortunate children turn out to have been left unfitted for what a decent life requires, who is to say that that condition can never be altered? Maybe one day someone will actually ask something of America's privileged young. Maybe, for example, the spectacle of all those brave and sturdy young men and women voluntarily shouldering a responsibility to their country in some far-off place like Iraq will spark in them a feeling of envy, or even shame.

Or perhaps even reading a jeremiad by a certain clever and passionate woman might awaken them to the idea that it is time to get over their parents' abdication of responsibility and take their future into their own potentially competent, though so sadly untried, hands. That, too, is after all a time-honored American tradition. Were it not, we'd have been in the soup long, long ago.

*Midge Decter is the author of several books, the former director of the Committee for the Free World, and a former president of the Philadelphia Society.*



Essay by Patrick J. Deneen

## FOLK TALES



**K**URT VONNEGUT, JR., WAS, ABOVE ALL, A curmudgeon. As an old curmudgeon, he became at times cranky and splenetic. But as a young curmudgeon, he was an unpredictable and wickedly equal opportunity critic, skewering the Left, the Right, and the apathetic. Like other acute critics on the Left—George Orwell, Christopher Lasch, and Wilson Carey McWilliams come to mind—Vonnegut refused to brook the idiocy and hubris of his fellow leftists. At his best, he challenged them from a traditionalist philosophical base that amounted to a kind of intuitive Aristotelianism, a far cry from the misanthropic temptations of his later years especially.

Vonnegut was from the middle of the Midwest, a child of Indianapolis during the Depression, and a member of “the greatest generation.” He served as an infantryman in the German theater of World War II, where famously he was captured and imprisoned in Dresden and survived the firebombing of that city in February 1945. Witnessing the killing of thousands of civilians in a city of dubious strategic importance, he was deeply affected by the experience, which became the basis of one of his best-known novels, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1972). He attended four colleges without graduating—among them Cornell, which he left in 1943 to enlist in the army—before holding a series

of jobs ending with a stint in public relations for General Electric. He walked away from that job in 1951 to write fiction, a career that began with little success and dubious promise. His early books—including *Player Piano* (1952) and *The Sirens of Titan* (1959)—earned him a reputation as a science fiction writer, a label that stuck with him through much of his career although he denied belonging in that niche.

Vonnegut’s early writing career consisted mainly of publishing stories in still-vibrant general interest magazines like *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier’s*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and even *Cosmopolitan*. My own introduction to Vonnegut came through a collection of this short fiction (*Welcome to the Monkey House*, 1968), which I found on the family bookshelf when I was about 14. Reading randomly in its pages I became smitten by the author’s ingenious satire. Vonnegut appealed especially to the young, as evidenced by the numerous graduation addresses he was invited to deliver over the course of his career. He was definitely a part of my college education, and that of many of my friends. On the morning I learned of his death (he died April 11, 2007), I asked the students I was teaching whether any had read Vonnegut, and of the hundred-plus in the class only a smattering raised their hands. Today’s students seem seldom to read

for pleasure in the way that once was an integral part of the college experience. They latch on to YouTube downloads rather than authors.

### Suspicion of Progress

**V**ONNEGUT WAS AN UNUSUAL MID-CENTURY American because he broke so strenuously with the American belief in progress. His suspicion of progress put Vonnegut in the good company of such authors as Melville, Hawthorne, and above all—the writer after whom he most styled himself—Mark Twain. Like Twain, he was a harsh critic of the American belief in the goodness of machines and, more broadly, of our faith in technology and moral progress. The denial of progress is a golden thread running through Vonnegut’s literary and non-fiction writings, expressed with particular force in his earliest works, in which he attacked mostly the liberal mainstream. Later in life—beginning perhaps in his 1990 novel *Hocus Pocus*, which he said he wrote in criticism of neoconservatism, and culminating in his last book, the autobiographical *A Man Without a Country* (2005) he poured his ire primarily upon conservatives, who seemed to share the liberal certainty that they could “solve” the problems human life unavoidably entails. Vonnegut’s move from

being a frequent critic of the Left to his later vituperative attacks on the Right perhaps had much to do with his preternatural inclination to criticize those in power, and thus, within the American context, those most apt to apply technology to try to cure the human condition. Because Vonnegut was himself a man of the Left, however, it is his criticisms of the Left that remain the most interesting, well-informed, and enduring.

His notion that humans tend to abuse their technological prowess partly condensed into a hatred of weaponry, which became thematic in his forceful critique of scientific obtuseness, *Cat's Cradle* (1963). Among his finest novels, *Cat's Cradle* portrays the consequences of the invention of a new form of ice—"ice nine"—created by a brilliant but oblivious scientist who fails to see that this invention will, and does, lead to the destruction of the world. But in Vonnegut's view technology was even more problematic when used by those with good intentions, who sought to alleviate all forms of human suffering and unhappiness. He brilliantly satirized this liberal utopianism in "Harrison Bergeron," one of my favorite stories from *Welcome to the Monkey House*, and among the few Vonnegut pieces that conservatives have widely appreciated. It begins: "The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal.... All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution." The story describes a world in which every form of inequality is "equalized" by the Handicapper General: those who are faster or stronger are required to wear weights, those who are more beautiful are forced to wear masks that make them look average, and those who are smarter wear headphones emitting noises that break concentration. Other stories in the volume similarly and eerily predict the do-gooders' tendency to misuse technology. In one ("Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow") the year is 2158 and a drug called "anti-gerasone" has halted the aging process and effectively created immortality. The consequence of this "blessing" is overpopulation and the generational tyranny of the old over the young. The old possess "all the money and votes" and occupy the best rooms in apartment buildings overflowing with multiple generations. The old take from the young and forestall their ascent to positions of maturity and independence. The ability of humans to extend the human lifespan results in a breakdown of generational obligations and undermines the natural inclination of the older to make sacrifices for the younger. This and other stories—like "Unready to Wear," which describes a future in which some humans abandon their bodies to live as incorporeal spirits without care or obligation—portray technology's tendency to undermine human dignity and love, obscure the demands and rewards of duty, and exacerbate human self-centeredness.

## Human Dignity and Human Nature

VONNEGUT DEVELOPED THIS THEME TO near-perfection in one of his finest books and his first novel, *Player Piano*, a chillingly prescient account of the rise of a meritocratic, automated America in which advancement up the economic ladder becomes the main measure of human success. Test scores and I.Q.s obsess those who seek entry into the meritocratic ascendancy. Degrees must be from the "right" college, and no one with a decent job lacks an advanced degree (even

His interpreter explains, "In the Shah's land are only the Elite and the *Takaru*."

According to the trajectories observed by Vonnegut, Bratpuhr does not lie so far ahead in America's economic future, which will consist of an upwardly mobile and successful elite versus a mass of increasingly underemployed service-industry workers who seek above all not the comprehensive equality of "Harrison Bergeron" but the dignity of knowing their life and work matter. As a revolutionary in *Player Piano* explains, "At the bottom of [the longing for a savior] will be a promise of regaining the feeling of participation, the feeling of being needed on earth—hell, *dignity*." What citizens seek is the knowledge that their lives have mattered; that their efforts can contribute to the good of the polity and the benefit of future generations. The practical result of much technology, even when pursued for seemingly good ends, Vonnegut argues, is to render human work increasingly meaningless and human relationships irrelevant. Vonnegut's critique would remind us that there is a pleasure, a reward to playing a piano with one's own hands that cannot be captured in the perfect mechanism of a player piano.

Many Vonnegut stories and novels point implicitly to the idea that humans have certain natural ends whose realization is necessary to live a good life. A fully realized human life would encourage the ties that bind the generations together, honor contributions to our communal good, and attain dignity for ourselves through our participation in the community. This is a conception of human good that would accept the limits of nature (like mortality) as a necessary boundary to the indiscriminate employment of technology, and defend culture as the necessary precondition of human flourishing.

## Lonely and Restless

VONNEGUT'S BELIEF IN A DISCERNIBLE human nature that requires a certain culture and cultivation for full flourishing was awakened, or perhaps confirmed by, his brief experience from 1945-1947 as a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Chicago. In an address to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1971 (included in a volume of non-fiction writings, *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*, 1974), Vonnegut speaks of his encounter in Chicago with the cultural anthropologist Robert Redfield, whose essay "The Folk Society" was formative to the novelist's thought.

[Redfield] acknowledged that primitive societies were bewilderingly various. He begged us to admit, though, that all of them had certain characteristics in common. For instance: They were all so small that everybody knew everybody well, and associations lasted for life. The members communicated inti-

### Books by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., discussed in this essay:

*Player Piano*. The Dial Press,  
352 pages, \$14 (paper)

*The Sirens of Titan*. The Dial Press,  
336 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Cat's Cradle*. The Dial Press,  
304 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Welcome to the Monkey House*. The Dial Press,  
352 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Slaughterhouse-Five*. The Dial Press,  
288 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*.  
The Dial Press, 320 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Slapstick, or Lonesome No More!*  
The Dial Press, 288 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Galapagos*. The Dial Press,  
336 pages, \$14 (paper)

*Hocus Pocus*. Berkley Trade Paperbacks,  
336 pages, \$14.95 (paper)

*A Man Without a Country*.  
Seven Stories Press,  
146 pages, \$23.95 (cloth), \$13.95 (paper)

the secretaries have Ph.D.s). Because the production of goods can be increasingly accomplished by machines, the world is not divided between haves and have-nots (even the least well-off workers live in middle-class comfort) but between those accorded dignity and those denied it. The visiting shah of Bratpuhr regards workers (most of whom dig holes on the government payroll) as nothing more than *takaru*, or slaves. In one telling scene, the secretary of state attempts to explain to the shah that these are actually citizens, but the shah understands citizen merely to be the translation of the word *takaru*.



mately with one another, and very little with anybody else.... There was no access to the experience and thought of the past, except through memory. The old were treasured for their memories. There was little change....

I say to you that we are full of chemicals which require us to belong to folk societies, or failing that, to feel lousy all the time. We are chemically engineered to live in folk societies, just as fish are chemically engineered to live in clean water—and there aren't any folk societies for us anymore.

How lucky you are to be here today, for I can explain *everything*. Sigmund Freud admitted that he did not know what women wanted. I know what they want. *Cosmopolitan* magazine says they want orgasms, which can only be a partial answer at best. Here is what women really want: They want lives in folk societies, wherein everyone is a friendly relative, and no act or object is without holiness. Chemicals make them want that. Chemicals make us all want that.

Chemicals make us furious when we are treated as things rather than persons. When anything happens to us which would not happen to us in a folk society, our chemicals make us feel like fish out of water. Our chemicals demand that we get back into water again. If we become increasingly wild and preposterous in modern times—well, so do fish on river banks, for a little while.

If we become increasingly apathetic in modern times—well, so do fish on river banks, after awhile. Our children often come to resemble apathetic fish—except that fish can't play guitars. And what do many of our children attempt to do? They attempt to form folk societies, which they call "communes." They fail. The generation gap is an argument between those who believe folk societies are still possible and those who know they aren't.

Vonnegut argued that modern humans are lonely and restless because of their "chemicals," a pseudo-scientific word (in an address delivered to science lovers) for what might just as well be called "nature." It is our nature to live in certain kinds of societies, and our modern loneliness, indignity,

and unhappiness stem from the fact that modernity has extirpated those societies. Of course, folk societies are not the same thing as the *polis*, which Aristotle declared was man's natural home, but then again, neither is the modern nation state; and so there may be as many unasked questions and unexamined assumptions in Vonnegut's notions as in many of our own. Nonetheless, Vonnegut seeks to point out that it is the human propensity and natural ability to invent machines and devices that help makes the extirpation of natural communities possible, even inevitable. Our ability to manipulate our environments—to conquer nature, with the exception, it seems, of human nature—contributes unavoidably to human unhappiness. In a novel he considered to be his finest (*Galapagos*, 1985), Vonnegut portrayed a future in which Darwinian evolution results in the loss of our opposable thumbs and our dangerously large brains, two features that turn out to have been unmitigated disasters for humanity and the planet. Having abandoned our natural condition which demands that we live in "folk societies," Vonnegut argues that nature will reassert itself and undo what technology has artificially created. An overarching theme of his work seems to be that nature will reassert its governance over humanity, unless we humans do ourselves in first.

#### Sense of Loss

THIS BLEAK AND EVEN MISANTHROPIC turn in Vonnegut's thought is unfortunate, though understandable in the shadow of the darker moments of the 20th century. I am more attracted to the Vonnegut who remains truer to his intuitive Aristotelianism, a Vonnegut who, like Tocqueville, recognized that in America forms of life that support the fruition of our nature would have to be (in Tocqueville's words) "artificially created." Vonnegut commended "granfalloon," artificial and otherwise meaningless groups that help give us a sense of participation in endeavors that are larger than ourselves. These networks inculcate a spirit of community and self-sacrifice, a kind of piecemeal and small-scale sense of belonging that forestalls those horrific modern efforts to remake the world to try to make us completely at home in it. My favorite example of such "artificially created" forms of folk society within

the reality of a mobile, individualistic America is described in his novel *Slapstick, or Lonesome No More!* (1976): in order to make us "lonesome no more," the newly elected president assigns every American a new middle name along with a phone book listing every other American who shares that new name. Presto—an instant extended family, a "granfalloon" of otherwise disconnected Americans who now have an excuse to speak with one another and even ask for help in times of need.

Vonnegut saw that the American inclination toward isolation and individualism, and the technological advances that made such disconnection ever more feasible if ultimately untenable, left a void in the modern soul. He sought to commend its alleviation not in the way so many people today attempt to assuage their longings—technological distractions, especially—but through the effort to re-create forms of "folk societies." These efforts recall above all Tocqueville's commendation of "the arts of association." We might think Vonnegut a hypocrite for living most of his adult life in an apartment in New York City. Yet, perhaps it was his own keen sense of loss that prompted him to write so passionately, and for so many, persuasively, of the need to cultivate community in times that make community so difficult. Asked this very question once—why not live as he thought human nature demanded—he responded,

Well, I'm used to the rootlessness that goes with my profession. But I would like people to be able to stay in one community for a lifetime, to travel away from it to see the world, but always to come home again. This is comforting. Whenever I go to Indianapolis now, a childish question nags at me, and I finally have to say it out loud: "Where is my bed?" I grew up there, and nearly 1,000,000 people live there now, but there is no place in that city where a bed is mine. So I ask, "Where is my bed?"—and then wind up in a Holiday Inn. You can't go home again.

Kurt Vonnegut helped me and my generation want to find our way home, for which I am ever grateful.

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## WHISTLING DIXIE

*The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Constitution*, by Kevin R.C. Gutzman.  
Regnery, 224 pages, \$19.95

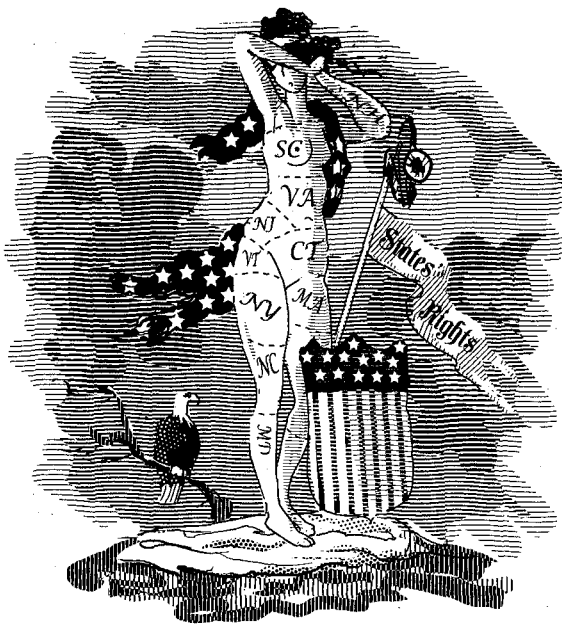
GIVEN THE HASH THAT HAS BEEN MADE of the United States Constitution by the modern Supreme Court, ordinary citizens who suspect foul play, but who lack any prior study of what passes for “constitutional law” nowadays, might benefit from an informative, accessible guide to the Constitution’s true principles. Sadly, Kevin Gutzman’s *Politically Incorrect Guide to the Constitution* fills only half the bill. Accessible it is; informative it is not.

A book that “guides” the reader through the Constitution might take a variety of approaches—a topical one, for instance, such as a tour through the document’s articles and amendments. Gutzman, who teaches at Western Connecticut University and holds a law degree from the University of Texas, has chosen a chronological approach, tracing the development of the Constitution from the Revolution to the present. Not counting a very brief introduction and conclusion, the book has twelve chapters. Seven of them, comprising nearly two-thirds of the text, are spent before Gutzman has gotten us past the Civil War and its immediate aftermath. Focusing on early history might be a sign of an instructive attention to the principles of the founding. After all, getting right with the Constitution ought to require a careful understanding of its beginnings and its greatest crisis.

But alas, the first two-thirds of this book are wrongheaded, tendentious, and bizarre. The trouble begins with the Revolution. Gutzman asserts that “America was [not] founded on” the principles in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, the one beginning “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” That stuff about human equality and inalienable rights was “hortatory” at best and at worst an illegitimate concoction of “a new theory of government.” So much for one of Gutzman’s putative heroes, Thomas Jefferson, who rightly thought this paragraph to be the heart of the matter. (It is far from clear that Gutzman understands that there *was* a Revolution; in defense of the South’s attempt to secede from the Union, he asserts that the United States “seceded from the British Empire.”) The idea that “sovereignty lay in the states,” our author avers, “was the first principle of American government.” But what makes state sovereignty itself legitimate? Gutzman never asks. He does not know a first principle when he sees one.

His attachment to state sovereignty causes him to misread every signal event of our early his-

tory. He believes that the criticism of the Articles of Confederation as inadequate to the needs of the Union—the view advanced by those who desired the very Constitution that is the subject of his *Guide*—was trumped up. He tells us that the Constitutional Convention was attended by three groups: “monarchists” like Alexander Hamilton, “nationalists” like James Madison, and defenders of “the primary place of the states” in the Union. He then ridiculously declares that the third group won all the decisive arguments at Philadelphia and in the ratification campaign, only to have



their authentic constitutionalism betrayed by the authors of *The Federalist*, the administration of George Washington, the early Congress, and the Supreme Courts of John Jay and John Marshall. In fact, the founders understood the Constitution to be a compact of the American people acting within their states, not a compact of the states as independent peoples or political sovereigns. On behalf of limited self-government, it divided authority between the states and the national government, but it granted states no right of nullification or secession and forbade them to make alliances without the consent of Congress. Asserting “state sovereignty” as Gutzman does would deny the Constitution any authority at all. Readers can be excused for suspecting that he does not actually like the Constitution very much. He is the true heir of the man most unstintingly praised in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Constitution*, the “Virginia philosopher-

statesman John Taylor of Caroline,” in truth an excitable crank whose turgid tomes on the Constitution are quietly and deservedly moldering on library shelves at our better universities.

THE SUPREME COURT, ESPECIALLY UNDER John Marshall, is Gutzman’s *bête noir*. Like many self-described conservatives, our author rails against the hunger for power he sees in the justices of the Court. But Gutzman wishes the Court had been *more* activist, not less so, throughout its history—on behalf of the states, that is, and against the national government. Gutzman’s Court would have declared the national bank unconstitutional, made federal navigation laws subordinate to conflicting state laws, ruled against Abraham Lincoln’s blockade of Southern ports, and outlawed conscription during World War I.

By the time we get to the later chapters on the genuinely egregious rulings of the modern Court, Gutzman has exhausted both his store of arguments and the intelligent reader’s credulity. Even when he is right, he substitutes denunciation for argument. One example will suffice: when he rightly condemns the “Incorporation Doctrine” that made the states subject to most of the strictures of the Bill of Rights, he simply announces that the doctrine is “plainly at variance with historical truth,” and leaves it at that. Really? Even the reader predisposed to agree might like an explanation.

Like Thomas Woods, the author of the earlier *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* (see “Mainly Incorrect,” CRB, Spring 2005), Gutzman is a neo-Confederate who resents the course our history has taken since the first day of the Philadelphia Convention. In his potted constitutional history, Lincoln is a villain, Marshall is a scoundrel, *The Federalist* is guilty of “great confusion about the document,” and Madison—Madison!—is an untrustworthy guide to understanding the Constitution. Perhaps all you need to know is that Gutzman wastes two pages arguing that we shouldn’t call the Civil War “the Civil War.” Some of the *PIG* books on non-political topics seem to be useful. But as with the Woods volume, Regnery Publishing has here done the reading public a great disservice.

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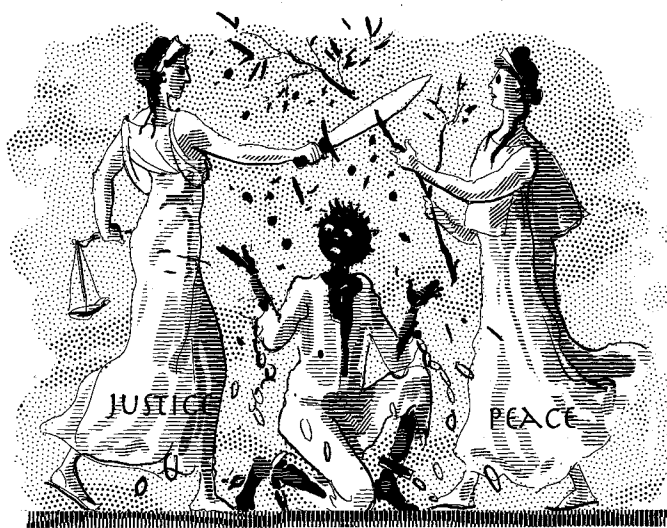


Book Review by Michael P. Zuckert

## CONFRONTING DRED SCOTT

*Dred Scott and the Politics of Slavery*, by Earl M. Maltz.  
University Press of Kansas, 184 pages, \$15.95

*Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil*, by Mark A. Graber.  
Cambridge University Press, 278 pages, \$40



IT WAS 150 LONG YEARS AGO THAT THE Supreme Court handed down what is now considered the most disastrous decision of its career, in the notorious *Dred Scott* case. In that decision the Court held that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional, for Congress lacked the power to prohibit slavery in the territories of the United States. Since Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party were seeking legislatively to control the further extension of slavery into the territories and hardly anything else, the decision in effect declared the party unconstitutional. The Court also ruled that black persons descended from slaves, whether free themselves or not, could never become citizens of the United States. What's more, Chief Justice Taney declared for the Court that in the eyes of those who made the Constitution, black people had no rights that white men were bound to respect.

It is astonishing that a decision making such strong claims was nearly unanimous in its main holdings. Seven justices accepted the conclusion that *Dred Scott* and his family were not free; six accepted the chief claims Taney made, although disagreeing in places with his line of reasoning. Two justices, McLean and Curtis, entered strong dissents to all aspects of Taney's decision.

But the decision was received with much less unanimity in the country at large, partly due to the fact that the Court had five Southerners and two Southern-sympathizing Northerners on it, a distribution hardly reflective of the nation. The

Republicans, not surprisingly, were reluctant to accept Taney's attempt to read them out of existence and instead attacked the decision and the Court itself. Southern Democrats, also unsurprisingly, were more positive about the case. The people caught in the middle were Northern Democrats, who under the leadership of Stephen Douglas had been pursuing the temporizing policy of "popular sovereignty" in the territories. *Dred Scott* undercut the Douglas policy nearly as much as it undercut the Republican platform, ultimately leading to a split in the Democratic Party that made possible the election of Lincoln, which in turn led to secession and the Civil War. *Dred Scott* was thus part of a chain of events and actions that brought the United States to its greatest crisis and its bloodiest war.

THE DRED SCOTT CASE, OF COURSE, IS NO longer good law. The post-Civil War amendments largely were aimed by the victorious Republicans at overturning the various elements of Taney's decision. Nonetheless, this 150th anniversary year has seen an outpouring of conferences, law review issues, and books on the case. Earl Maltz, a law professor at Rutgers, and Mark Graber, a professor of law and government at the University of Maryland, have produced two of the most significant reconsiderations.

Their work more or less reflects two lines of interpretation that have developed in the years between the emergence of the Civil Rights movement

and the present. Both are hostile toward the case itself. (No serious scholar is willing to endorse the outcome as correct in the larger sense.) Yet within this broad agreement there is a serious disagreement, which Graber well explains. He maintains that while most scholars have seen *Dred Scott* as a constitutional aberration, a wild burst of judicial activism in the service of a bad cause, he sees it as, if not the correct decision, then given the Constitution and the state of the law and politics of the day, at least a very plausible one, and centrist to boot. He is, to this extent, a neo-Garrisonian, accepting the notion that the Constitution and the structure of antebellum American politics were largely pro-slavery. Thus his title: the system contained "constitutional evil" in the form of its pro-slavery features, and the question was how best to deal with it. Of course, the Taney majority did not see things quite that way. What Graber thinks is constitutional evil Taney seems to have seen as constitutional—and political and moral—good.

Maltz, on the other hand, stands in a neo-Lincolnian tradition, which sees the decision as bad because it deviated from the Constitution at its best. Thus Maltz concludes his solid analysis of the various opinions in the case by affirming that dissenting Justice Benjamin Curtis "clearly had the better of the argument on the larger constitutional questions presented by *Dred Scott*." This is not a judgment shared by Graber.

Maltz's book surely does not supplant Don's Fehrenbacher's monumental 1978 study, *The Dred*

Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics, but it has many virtues that make it a useful resource for the reader not quite up to Fehrenbacher's 700 pages of text and notes. Though not much more than one-fifth the size of Fehrenbacher's study, *Dred Scott and the Politics of Slavery* provides concise accounts of the legal and political context of the case, together with an uneven but in many parts very fine account of what the various Supreme Court Justices argued in their opinions. Maltz's book is less learned historically than Graber's, but it is more sure-footed in dealing with the legal issues, in some cases more so even than Fehrenbacher. Many of its great strengths are quiet ones. For example, Maltz provides a superb interpretation of Taney's opinion for the Court, giving an excellent account of the way in which Taney was able to make room for considering the Missouri Compromise, even though he had already denied jurisdiction in the case because Scott was not and could not be a U.S. citizen. The author likewise does a fine job of showing how the appeal to the due process clause fit into Taney's overall argument. His account of Curtis's dissent is also very good. Maltz's book is solid, useful, mostly sound—but not very exciting.

GRABER'S BOOK IS NEARLY THE REVERSE—exciting, novel, thought-provoking, irritating, learned, loopy, and unsound in many places. But it is a book worth reading. Graber insists that the Constitution made compromises with slavery, and that Lincoln much overstated the situation when he said that the founders dealt with slavery in such a way as to lead the public to believe that it was "in the course of ultimate extinction." Some Americans may have thought so, but not all by any means. Thus far, he is like the neo-Garrisonians. But Graber differs from them in a drastic way: he thinks "constitutional evil," the acceptance of injustice, is a likely component of political order in pluralistic societies. He contrasts two different reactions to the existence of such constitutional evil: a constitutional politics of justice—practiced by Garrison and Lincoln—and a constitutional politics of peace—favored by Graber.

The Constitution, both as adopted in 1787 and as it had evolved in practice up to 1857, was sufficiently ambiguous that competing versions of the Constitution of justice, as it were, could plausibly be extracted from it—and indeed were, ending in the "crisis of the house divided." But the sounder Constitution, truer to both the founding generation and the course of American constitutional development, pointed to a constitutionalism of peace,

which Graber argues was better represented by the Taney position in *Dred Scott* than by Lincoln's position. Superior even to Taney, the author seems to think, was Stephen Douglas, who "better understood the Constitution of 1787 than did Lincoln." Lincoln "failed the Constitution by forgetting that his obligation to adopt a plausible interpretation of the Constitution that best preserved the social peace was constitutionally higher than his obligation to adopt a plausible interpretation of the Constitution that best promoted justice." In terms of constitutional theory *Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil* is directed above all against the work of Ronald Dworkin. In terms of political theory and political history, Graber's book is an extended argument against Harry V. Jaffa's interpretation of Lincoln and the Civil War.

The "better understanding" of the Constitution that Graber unveils is one in which there were both constitutional norms and constitutional structures intended to guarantee that constitutional decisions about slavery would be bisectional, i.e., that political elites both North and South could sign off on them, perhaps in the form of big compromise packages. The original Constitution, Graber holds, was built around the assumption that population would shift to the South and Southwest, which fact, together with the three-fifths clause, would give slave-holders control of the House of Representatives. The North, with its smaller but greater number of states, would control the Senate. Any legislation regarding sectionally divisive issues would require both sections to agree.

But population patterns proved to be altogether different from expected, and the free states came over time to overwhelm the slaveholders in the House. For a long while, but no longer by 1857, the South had managed to maintain parity in the Senate. But the crucial institution that maintained the bisectional Constitution of peace was the Jacksonian Democratic Party, and to a lesser degree the national Whig Party. The Civil War crisis arose when the Whig Party collapsed and was superseded by the completely sectional Republican Party. This development disrupted the bisectional Constitution of the antebellum period. And thus Lincoln and the Republicans were to blame for the secession and war.

As should be apparent from this brief summary, it is not in fact Douglas who is Graber's constitutional theorist of choice but someone else rarely named in the book—John C. Calhoun. In one important passage, Calhoun is named as a theorist of "consensus democracy," the model Graber alleges

was the true constitutional order and the one he clearly favors.

THERE ARE TOO MANY DUBIOUS OR MISTAKEN aspects of Graber's argument to confront here, but let me mention two that are quite central. First, in his interpretation of the 1787 Constitution he is engaging in a peculiar form of Whig history. He reads back into the founding a level of concern with sectionalism and slavery that simply was not present at the time, though of course it became far more important later. He fails to put the making of the Constitution in its proper context—namely, federation-making. He assumes that the founders saw themselves as legislating for a sectionally divided nation. In fact, however, they understood themselves to be creating a *federation*, a new kind to be sure, but one that would as a matter of course have little to do with the purely internal governance of its member states. The framers thought slavery constitutionally protected in the states where it existed chiefly because the new federal government had no powers granted to it to deal with slavery in the states. Graber depreciates the significance of the Constitution's enumerated powers, offering instead his own highly speculative account of the founders' expectations of national population growth. His broader claim that the 1787 Constitution was designed to be a Calhounian instrument, i.e., a system of concurrent majorities, does not fit the actual history of the founding.

But even if we accept his Calhounian interpretation of the constitutional order, it is quite difficult to see how *Dred Scott* can be properly read as an endorsement of that theory. *Dred Scott* denied and rejected the foundation or the chief means that had served most if not all of the bisectional accommodations hitherto. By denying Congress the power to prohibit slavery in the territories, the decision destroyed the possibility of a bisectional solution to the problem of slavery in the territories and guaranteed the solution favored by one section only—the slave-holding South.

Few readers will fail to find this provocative book stimulating, and no serious admirers of Lincoln can avoid facing Graber's challenge to their hero.

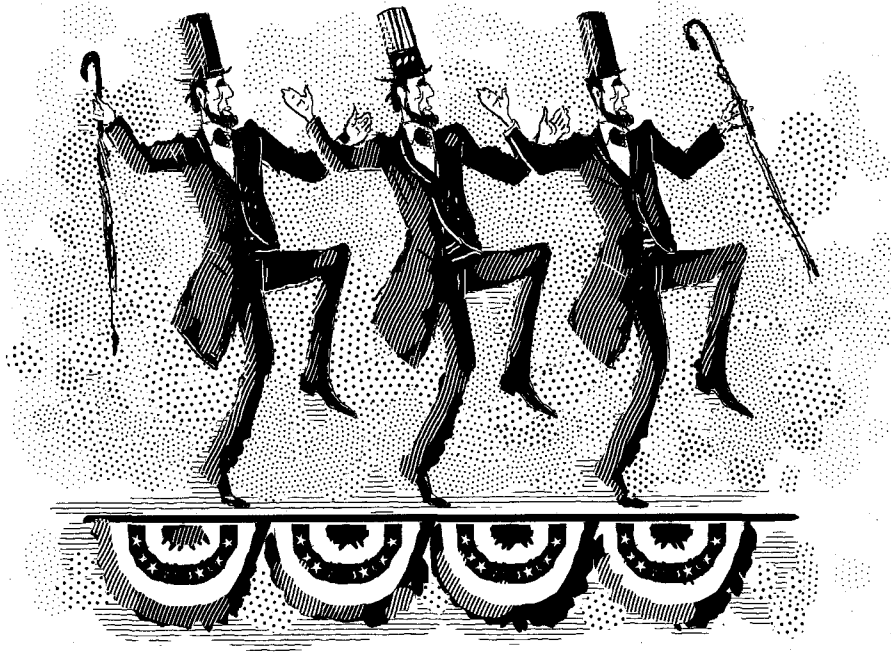
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Book Review by Ken Masugi

## O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

*Land of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe's America*, by Andrew Ferguson.  
Atlantic Monthly Press, 304 pages, \$24



GROWING UP IN ILLINOIS, ANDREW Ferguson had a healthy admiration for Springfield's most famous resident. But it wasn't until years later that the controversial unveiling of a new statue of Abraham Lincoln in the former Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, set him off to travel the country, interviewing the officials, curators, collectors, reenactors, and management workshop executives who populate his new book, in order to see how our 16th president is remembered today.

A senior editor for the *Weekly Standard*, Ferguson engages Lincoln fans on their own terms—with all their vanity and vulgarity, not to mention their ignorance—yet without denying their attraction, however inchoate, for greatness. But what can you expect when Lincoln has largely been stripped of his noble achievements by the academy and *au courant* museums? Ferguson is dismayed to find that the Chicago Historical Society has dismantled the beloved dioramas and deathbed scene that had moved him to tears as a boy. The “myth or the icon” had been replaced by “a Lincoln that’s much more human”—and ordinary.

This reduction is on display in the garish new Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum in Springfield, an extravaganza of “emotional engineering” and multi-screen special effects. The genius be-

hind it all is Bob Rogers, a former Walt Disney executive. For Rogers, television and video games have made “today’s audiences...subverbal. They require constant stimulation.” In his view “a great movie” is one where “you still get about seventy percent of what’s going on. Without hearing a word.” Of course, without words, explanations, or speeches, why have any particular devotion to the Lincoln-Douglas debates? Or to the wartime addresses which adorn his memorial? Rogers effuses, “I can give [Lincoln] to you any way you want, cold or hot, jazz or classical. I can give you scandalous Lincoln, conservative Lincoln, liberal Lincoln, racist Lincoln, Lincoln over easy or Lincoln scrambled” (though evidently not hard-boiled).

The visible sign of this mushiness is Rogers’s boast that the Museum does not contain a single actual firearm. Smoking fake cannons stun the audience, but they will see no real weapons—swords, bayonets, rifles—or ammunition. “We made a conscious decision that we did not want to glorify war,” he explains.

Ferguson acknowledges those neo-Confederates who claim that Lincoln was a tyrant. He cites Thomas DiLorenzo’s error-riddled *The Real Lincoln* (2002) more than any other book, and not simply to knock it. The Lincoln haters, who blame unnecessary wars and big government liberalism

on the Great Emancipator, seem to possess sharper contemporary political instincts than liberals who build bland, slouching statues of a merely life-sized Lincoln. Ferguson does not directly confront Lincoln’s current enemies, but instead tries to outflank them by saving Lincoln from his friends.

Traveling the Lincoln Trail through Illinois and into Indiana, together with his wise wife and wisecracking kids, Ferguson comes to the iconic log cabin. Here he learns that “[t]he people who rebuilt New Salem eighty years ago wanted their history to inspire and uplift a visitor, to illustrate moral truths about courage and enterprise, and if it didn’t do that they worried that the history they were telling was somehow illegitimate, or a failure.” But science has proven that this cabin, presented as the real one, was constructed of logs from the 1850s, when Lincoln was a grown man. So the park ranger tells him this is a “symbolic cabin.” With the crushed spirit of a true believer, Ferguson moans “So the thing is...a fake?” “Not a fake,” the ranger said. He looked offended. “Symbolic.”

ALTHOUGH THE LOGS ARE SYMBOLIC, PLENTY of real Lincoln collectibles are out there. (In fact, there is a strong market even for real Lincoln forgeries.) The prime collector, Louise Taper, declares “I’ve got the stuff”—anything from

chamber pots to documents. "I'm in every phase of Lincolnworld," and she plays it for all it's worth. But why collect these sacred objects? Ferguson holds a copy of the Gettysburg Address drafted in Lincoln's own hand and feels "nothing...or...[n]ot as much as I expected to feel. Holding the thing, in fact, wasn't for me quite as moving as actually reading the words that make up the address, the greatest public utterance in our history."

Lincoln reenactors (whose annual convention Ferguson covers) may come in many shapes and sizes, but their devotion is undeniable. We see the same piety in the Thai restaurant owner who dedicates a Buddhist shrine, with a fresh meal placed as an offering each day, to Lincoln (carefully omitting pork, in respect for what he takes to be Abraham's Jewish ancestry). But the power of Lincoln's appeal comes out most beautifully in the Epilogue, in the story of a Czech concentration camp survivor who made a taxing journey to fulfill his vow to honor the Great Emancipator at his tomb. Ferguson might have noted that the Hungarian free radio station, before its silencing in the ill-fated 1956 rebellion against

Communism, spent its last hours broadcasting the Gettysburg Address in seven languages. He also might have covered some of the other popular representations of Lincoln in textbooks, and movies (from *Young Mr. Lincoln* to *Gangs of New York*), and the hapless bungle of the U.S. government's official Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. But these might have proven distractions from his personal journey of recovering Lincoln.

**T**HE BOOK'S PILGRIMAGE LEADS FERGUSON into moments of doubt, but it is on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that his understanding blossoms:

I was happy to find a Lincoln that was simpler and more plausible than the ones I'd gotten from scholars, haters, publicists, and buffs.... [T]he bigger, unarguable facts... are plain in front of us. And that's what the Lincoln Memorial is for: the brute, uncomplicated facts of Lincoln's public life....

Lincoln saved the Union but it was a

particular kind of Union he saved: a union dedicated to a proposition.... If Lincoln had failed, the country would have ceased to exist. The founders would have lost their bet that ordinary people could govern themselves, and the principle they were betting on—that all men are created equal—would have slipped into darkness, and no one can say when it might have been revived.

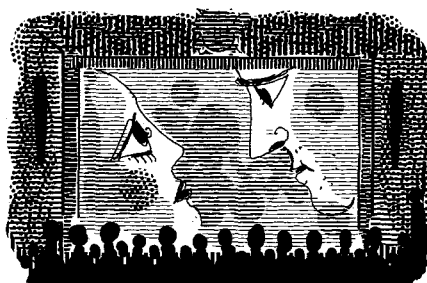
Ferguson reminds Americans why we have that majestic memorial in the first place. What's more, by using the various Lincolnophiles' own words, he allows Americans themselves to present an engaging civics lesson addressing both our flaws and strengths. *Land of Lincoln* is a practical lesson in the requirements of self-government. It reflects and renews Lincoln's teaching that, in the end, public opinion is central to the perpetuation of our political institutions.

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## SHADOW PLAY

by Martha Bayles



# Whatever It Takes

**T**O JUDGE BY THE BOTTOM LINE, HOLLYWOOD's latest venture into *cinema engagé* is not resonating with the public. Autumn 2007 saw the release of four films claiming to tackle hard questions about hard power: *In the Valley of Elah*, directed by Paul Haggis, offers a nightmare vision of U.S. soldiers in Iraq; *The Kingdom*, directed by Peter Berg, dramatizes an FBI probe into terrorism in Saudi Arabia; *Rendition*, directed by Gavin Hood, focuses on "extraordinary rendition," the American government's handing over of prisoners to countries where torture is allowed; *Lions for Lambs*, directed by Robert Redford, accuses the news media of passivity and the privileged young of apathy. None has done well at the box office, so this trend may soon die out. But that raises a question: why haven't these films attracted a bigger audience?

Ask a blue-state pundit, and you'll hear that Americans are so brainwashed by Fox News, they are no longer capable of thinking for themselves. Ask a red-stater, and you'll hear that Americans are so savvy about the Global War on Terror, they reject unpatriotic propaganda, even if it does star Meryl Streep and Tom Cruise. These answers polarize as neatly as metal shavings around a magnet. But a better answer, albeit one less gratifying to pundits of all colors, is that Americans don't want to think about tough foreign policy issues—and they are encouraged not to by both Washington and Hollywood.

### Speaking Their Minds

**L**ET US BEGIN WITH THE MOST RECENT release, *Lions for Lambs*. The reviews damned it for being "talky," but this is a bogus criticism. Many great films are "talky" in the sense of giving us powerful characters capable of speaking their minds. *Lions for Lambs* is not a great film by any stretch. And many conservatives already know what they think about Robert Redford's politics. But at least this film *has* politics—and in its halting way it captures something of America's current

mood. There are three story lines: in California, a political science professor named Stephen (Robert Redford) tries to motivate a gifted but apathetic student, Todd (Andrew Garfield); in Washington, an ambitious Republican senator named Jasper (Tom Cruise) tries to browbeat a liberal journalist, Janine (Meryl Streep), into supporting his new military initiative; and in the mountains

to it. This is a dodge, because while most of the news media did go along with President Bush's invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, one would have to be living on the moon (or in Europe) to think they are going along with the surge or with the idea of a military strike against Iran. Cruise and Streep are terrific actors, needless to say, but this plot line is much weaker than the other two—including, surprisingly, the conversation between the professor and his student.

Caveat: Hollywood never gets academia right. But having said that, let me give credit where credit is due. In his struggle to make Stephen a sympathetic character, Redford makes him into that rare species, the political science professor who does not use the old 1960s cattle prod to indoctrinate his students. How can we tell? Two of his favorites, Arian and Ernest (minority students on scholarship), respond to his call to "get involved" by enlisting in the army. Stephen objects, of course. But the film makes clear that the students' decision is not unreasonable, given what their professor has been urging. Later Stephen tells Todd that he served in Vietnam but then protested the war. What's amazing is that Todd doesn't already know this, because evidently, Stephen doesn't crow about it on the first day of class. Despite the blue denim and politics to match, this professor confines himself to exhorting students to take seriously their rights and duties as citizens. American higher education could do worse—and usually does.

As for Arian and Ernest, their story line is a pure comrades-in-arms war flick. Loyal and courageous to the end, their ordeal on a snowy mountaintop in Afghanistan is all the more gripping for the stark contrast it presents with life back in the States. While the politicians, journalists, professors, and students discuss weighty matters in comfortable surroundings, the real weight is borne by the soldiers in the field. Everybody gives lip service to this fact, but rarely is it brought home emotionally to those not directly involved. To give emotional heft to the facts is the work of culture,

#### Films discussed in this essay:

*In the Valley of Elah*, directed by Paul Haggis.  
Screenplay by Paul Haggis. Warner Bros.

*The Kingdom*, directed by Peter Berg.  
Screenplay by Matthew Michael Carnahan.  
Universal Pictures.

*Rendition*, directed by Gavin Hood.  
Screenplay by Kelley Sane.  
New Line Cinema.

*Lions for Lambs*, directed by Robert Redford.  
Screenplay by Matthew Michael Carnahan.  
United Artists.

#### Also discussed:

24, created by Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran. Fox Television Network.

of Afghanistan, two of Stephen's former students turned army rangers, Arian (Derek Luke) and Ernest (Michael Pena), try against forbidding odds to make that initiative work.

Strange as it sounds, the *tête-à-tête* between the senator and the reporter is won by the senator. Jasper's initiative may stink (the rest of the film says so), but Janine's protestations are truly feeble. Her main issue, it turns out, is not the war on terrorism (about which she has little to say) but the failure of the news media to voice any real opposition



including popular culture. But popular culture has been doing a poor job of it lately. Indeed, if Redford is truly concerned about the public being fed fantasy instead of reality, he will make his next protest film about Hollywood's increasingly sick attitude towards violence.

### Brutalization

IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH IS THE OPPOSITE OF a comrades-in-arms war flick. It begins when Hank (Tommy Lee Jones), a retired military police officer living in Tennessee, learns that his son Mike, just back from Iraq, has been reported AWOL. This sounds suspicious to Hank, so he drives to Fort Rudd, New Mexico, to check things out. Stonewalled by the army and local police, he launches his own investigation, aided by a discontented detective, Emily (Charlize Theron). When Mike's charred remains are found on a hillside, the film becomes a police procedural, though Hank and Emily are no high-tech CSI team: they just poke around, ask questions, collar the wrong suspect, and finally elicit a confession from one of Mike's buddies.

The denouement comes when Mike's buddy, morphing gradually from fresh-faced youth to cold blond beast, recalls how he stabbed Mike to death after a minor altercation, then set the body on fire because he and his buddies were hungry and did not want to take the time to bury it. To this horror are added two more, visualized through a succession of fractured images rescued from Mike's damaged cell phone. The first occurs on Mike's first day of duty: his armored vehicle runs over an Iraqi child who fails to get out of its way. The second occurs several months later, when Mike has become a different person, a joker whom the others call "Doc," because he gets his jollies thrusting his hand into the gaping wounds of captured Iraqi prisoners. Right after Mike's killer reveals this to Hank, the cell phone images coalesce into a shot of Mike grinning glassy-eyed while doing the deed off camera.

*In the Valley of Elah* is a deadly serious film about a deadly serious topic: the brutalization of young soldiers under the hellish conditions of an insurgency they are neither trained nor equipped to fight. Ironically, Hank, the straight-arrow warrior whose life is upended by these grim revelations, is a Vietnam vet. Last I checked, the Vietnam War was also a nasty insurgency that brutalized some of those fighting it. Hollywood certainly thought so. Right afterward, in the late 1970s, a slew of films appeared portraying soldiers and veterans as dangerous lunatics: *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Rolling Thunder* (1977), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *The Ninth Configuration* (1980). The noble exception was *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and by the 1980s, it was no longer cool to portray Vietnam vets as nut jobs. *In the Valley of Elah* is based on a true story, and that story is not unique. But it would carry more moral

authority if it appeared after the conflict was over. There is something unseemly about producing a film about the demoralization of American troops while thousands of them are still in harm's way.

### Torture's Mythology

THE SICKEST PART, THOUGH, IS THE PUBLIC response to *In the Valley of Elah*. Ten years ago, a movie showing an American soldier torturing a prisoner for kicks would have raised a hue and cry. Today it occasions barely a murmur. What has changed? In the realm of popular culture, the most obvious change is that scenes of torture, including vivid on-camera ones, are now standard fare. The best known example is 24, the Fox TV series starring Kiefer Sutherland as Jack Bauer, America's favorite anti-terrorist. Jack Bauer does not torture prisoners for kicks, but he does torture them frequently: 67 times in the first five seasons, by one count. And these scenes are a wonder to behold. Jack Bauer can maul a captive and get actionable intelligence faster than I can put a dollar in a vending machine and get a Diet Coke.

The motives for torture are as old as human society: to punish wrongdoers, to crush dissent, to intimidate populations, to force retroactive confessions. Perhaps the most primal motive, shared by cats toying with mice, is to lord it over the weak. In war this is called "victor's spoils," the pleasure of inflicting pain on vanquished enemies. This is Mike's motive, which together with the others mentioned above is rejected as barbarous and tyrannical by all liberal democracies, including the United States. But that leaves one additional motive: Jack Bauer's. In the debate over whether it is right to define waterboarding, stress positions, and other "leave no mark" methods as "enhanced interrogation" not torture, a frequent touchstone is 24. For many Americans, Jack Bauer makes it easier to argue that even torture is okay when used by a scrupulous professional. To quote the standard riposte: *what would you do if a ticking time bomb were about to go off, and the guy tied to the chair in front of you was withholding the information you needed to prevent catastrophe?*

This frequent reference to 24 is unfortunate, because although the show is highly addictive (your sober reviewer confesses to having inhaled the first four seasons), it should not be a touchstone in this debate. Despite its many charms, 24 embodies a mix of cowardice and recklessness, the two vices that Aristotle contrasted with the virtue of courage. The cowardice shows up in the program's timid selection of villains: vengeful Serbs, a bitchy German, red-handed Mexican drug lords, a turncoat British spy, a greedy oil executive, power-mad government officials (including one president), and—once in a blue moon, when the Council on American-Islamic Relations is looking the other way—violent jihadists.

As for recklessness, it shows up in the demeanor of 24's creative mastermind, Joel Surnow, a man who by his own testimony came up the hard way. The son of a Los Angeles carpet salesman, he grew up south of Olympic Boulevard, where there was never enough money for the designer sunglasses favored by his classmates at Beverly Hills High. Apparently this youthful deprivation provides an excuse for acting like a jerk. Last year, Surnow blew off Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan, dean of West Point, and Joe Navarro, an expert FBI interrogator, when they traveled to Los Angeles to urge a change in the way 24 depicts torture. These visitors were seasoned practitioners with a practical complaint: that their cadets and trainees, steeped in the excitement of 24, now dismiss warnings about the legality of torture and (more troubling) the evidence of its limited effectiveness.

Some of Surnow's colleagues, including Sutherland himself, did meet with Finnegan and Navarro. So it will be interesting to see how torture is dealt with in the seventh season (scheduled to begin in January but probably postponed because of the Writers Guild of America strike). To judge by the online trailer, the issue will be front and center:

White letters on black screen: *They can attack him.*

Senator in hearing room, grilling Jack: "Mr. Bauer, did you torture Mr. Haddad?"

White letters on black screen: *They can judge him.*

Jack: "Senator, Ibrahim Haddad had targeted a bus carrying 45 people, 10 of which were children. I stopped that attack from happening."

White letters on black screen: *But they can never break him.*

Jack: "Don't expect me to regret the decisions that I have made, because sir, the truth is, I don't."

You go, Jack. And if I were faced with a choice between letting humanity be blown to smithereens and pulling out my grandmother's fingernails, it would be "Brace yourself, Granny," and no regrets afterward. But I'm not faced with that choice, and 99% of the time neither are real interrogators faced with the ticking time bomb scenario. Retired Colonel Stu Herrington, a 30-year veteran of military intelligence, has been quoted to the effect that this scenario "is so rare in real life that it's essentially mythology." The 24 creative team is smart and talented, so perhaps it will find ways to continue making great television while also addressing the concerns of those who



are actually fighting the war against terrorism. But don't count on Surnow. His refusal to meet with Finnegan and Navarro is a classic case of recklessness holding courage in contempt.

#### A Reassuring Professionalism

**M**OST PEOPLE CONSIDER 24 A RIGHT-WING show, in contrast with the left-wing slant of the feature films discussed here. Yet 24 has left its mark on the feature film industry, make no mistake. In both *The Kingdom* and *Rendition* there is a Jack Bauer-like character: brave, smart, loath to inflict pain, but adept at doing so when needed. Interestingly, neither is an American. In *The Kingdom*, it is Faris Al Ghazi, an

upright Saudi policeman played with toughness and charm by Ashraf Barhom. Basically an action film, *The Kingdom* stars Jamie Foxx as Ronald, a maverick FBI agent who defies his inept superiors and a timid State Department to lead a proper investigation into a terrorist attack on a U.S. enclave in Saudi Arabia (similar to the 1996 Khobar Towers attack). When Ronald's team arrives in Riyadh, they are stonewalled by the Saudis until a discontented cop, Al Ghazi, steps forward to help. His Jack Bauer moment comes when he stops the torture of a prisoner—not because he opposes torture in principle, but because he deduces from the evidence that it's fruitless in this case.

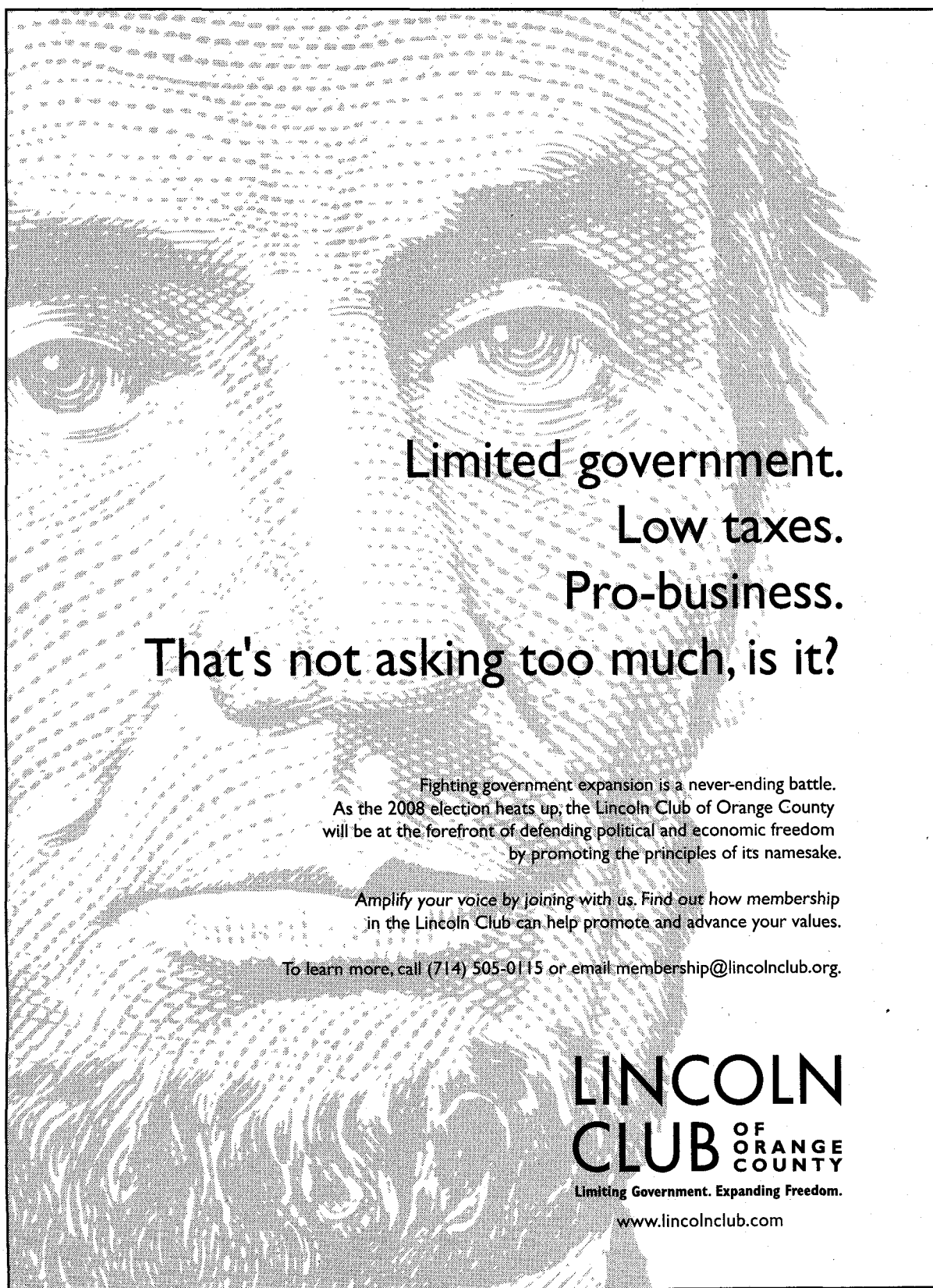
It is vital to distinguish between Al Ghazi, a fine officer with a warm heart and a cool head, and

the nameless goons who do the actual trussing, beating, electrocuting, whatever. Like Mike's sadism, the goons' work is kept decorously off camera: all we see is the scrupulous professional giving the orders. A similar scene occurs in *A Mighty Heart*, the powerful film about the terrorist killing of journalist Daniel Pearl. In that film, the professional is a gentle, handsome officer (played by Irfan Khan) in the Pakistan secret police, the ISI, who gazes soulfully at his captive every time he is obliged to order another round of agony. Like 24, both *The Kingdom* and *A Mighty Heart* reassure us that the good guys are in charge, not the goons.

Surprisingly, the same reassurance appears in *Rendition*, a would-be exposé of extraordinary rendition. Anwar (Omar Metwally) is an Egyptian-born chemical engineer living in Chicago and married to an American, Isabella (Reese Witherspoon). Because his mobile phone has been receiving calls from a terrorist group, Anwar is arrested while traveling home from an overseas conference, and rendered to an unnamed country in North Africa, where he is stripped, beaten, isolated in a cold cell, and waterboarded by goons working for the local police chief, Abasi (Igal Naor). Strictly speaking, this interrogation is overseen by Douglas (Jake Gyllenhaal), a CIA "pencil pusher" who steps in after another agent's death. But compared with Abasi, Douglas is a cardboard figure whose sole purpose is to show revulsion at the proceedings and (regardless of Anwar's guilt or innocence) inveigle his release. Abasi, by contrast, is a surprisingly sympathetic character: brave, smart, loving toward his family, but also haunted by his grim job. Remind you of anyone?

At the end *Rendition* loses momentum because of a plot twist whose only conceivable function is to keep Abasi from being too sympathetic. The film starts with the suicide bombing of a café where he takes tea every morning. Many are killed, but Abasi survives, and from there the film cross-cuts between three story lines: Abasi's interrogation of Anwar; the efforts of Isabel back in the States to find out what's happened to Anwar; and a secret romance between Abasi's daughter Fatima (Zineb Oukach) and a scruffy artist named Khalid (Moa Khouas). This third story line climaxes when Khalid turns out to be a suicide bomber who wooed Fatima as part of a plot against her father. Over time, the two have fallen in love, so when Khalid goes to kill Abasi, Fatima tries to stop him—and might have succeeded if Khalid's handlers hadn't made that impossible. The bomb explodes, and both lovers die.

The weird part is that this is the same explosion that opens the film. Instead of reaching for our handkerchiefs, we scratch our heads: *Huh? What's going on? Suddenly we're back at the beginning!* Since this confusion destroys the whole momentum of the ending, we might also wonder why the romance and death of Fatima and Khalid are not



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simply treated as a flashback. My hunch is this was the original intention, but that during the editing process somebody realized that if the audience knows from the beginning that Abasi's daughter was killed by a terrorist, they might forget the whole anti-rendition message and start rooting for Abasi as the Maghreb's answer to Jack Bauer.

It soothes the conscience, and boosts the box office, to portray U.S.-sanctioned torture as occurring only under the watchful eye of scrupulous professionals. It also helps to neutralize criticism of Hollywood for stereotyping Arabs and Muslims, to cast excellent actors like Ashraf Barhom and Igal Naor in Jack Bauer-like roles. With guys like Al Ghazi and Abasi in charge, we can relax. The prisoners may be screaming, but the interrogators take no pleasure in making them scream, and the pain stops the moment the prisoners either talk or establish their innocence. The situation is dire but not spiraling out of control.

### Playground for Sadists

THE TROUBLE IS, THE FACTS ARE OTHERWISE. Ticking time bombs are rare, and so are human beings capable of sustaining a scrupulously professional attitude toward torture. Indeed, when torture becomes the routine business of any military or law enforcement organization, the first thing that happens is the good guys take off and the goons take over. To believe otherwise is to be naïve about human nature. But don't take my word for it, take that of Vladimir Bukovsky, the former Soviet dissident who spent twelve years in that system's prisons, labor camps, and coercive "psychiatric hospitals." His capsule summary of why it is never a good idea to legalize and routinize torture is worth quoting at length:

Apart from sheer frustration and other adrenaline-related emotions, investigators and detectives in hot pursuit have enormous temptation to use force to break the will of their prey because they believe that, metaphorically speaking, they have a "ticking

bomb" case on their hands. But, much as a good hunter trains his hounds to bring the game to him rather than eating it, a good ruler has to restrain his henchmen from devouring the prey lest he be left empty-handed. Investigation is a subtle process, requiring patience and fine analytical ability, as well as a skill in cultivating one's sources. When torture is condoned, these rare talented people leave the service, having been outstripped by less gifted colleagues with their quick-fix methods, and the service itself degenerates into a playground for sadists. Thus, in its heyday, Joseph Stalin's notorious NKVD [the Soviet secret police] became nothing more than an army of butchers terrorizing the whole country but incapable of solving the simplest of crimes. And once the NKVD went into high gear, not even Stalin could stop it at will.

I do not believe that this is a description of the United States's war on terror. But if I were a foreigner with no better source of information than Hollywood films, I might be forgiven for believing it. To judge by overall box office, the American love of torture has regressed from Jack Bauer's reluctant rule-bending to the Marquis de Sade's voracious vivisection. Audiences do not flock to see *Lions for Lambs* and *Rendition*; they flock to see *Saw IV* and *Hostel Part 2*, the latest specimens of a new genre that David Edelstein of *New York* magazine dubbed "torture porn." One of the cable channel Showtime's biggest hits is *Dexter*, about a forensic expert specializing in Advanced Bloodstain Pattern Analysis, whose chief joy consists in spilling blood, not analyzing it. A boyish team player, *Dexter* moonlights as a vigilante, ritually torturing and killing those criminals whom the system fails to bring to justice. If *Dirty Harry*'s threat was "Make my day," *Dexter*'s guarantee is "Make my night."

It is hard to criticize this stuff, because ever since 1992, when Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* made casual cruelty look cool, the *Sunset*

Boulevard party line is that violence ceases to be shocking when it goes "over the top" into depictions of mayhem so extreme, so surreal, that they resemble the fevered imaginings of a mass murderer or extreme sociopath. Why this should be so, I have never heard anyone explain satisfactorily. The question is considered *infra dig* by the P.R. flacks and bloggers surrounding this genre—their websites and commentary are full of a bizarre, morally inverted appreciation of ever greater spectacles of destruction. Torture is a favorite at this feast, folks, and we're not talking about some weak-weenie waterboarding, we're talking about *real* torture, the prancing-around-in-arterial-blood-spray kind that is fun for the whole family.

For a taste of the sensibility involved, consider this remark by Darren Bousman, the director of *Saw IV* (and two of its predecessors). Hyping his new film, he boasted that it contains "a scene... where I physically regurgitated in my mouth." Bousman belongs to the self-described Hollywood "Splat Pack," a group of junior sadists mentored by Tarantino, who revel in their ability to mass-produce the most repugnant imaginable fantasies. As Eli Roth, director of *Hostel* and *Hostel Part 2*, recently told a national magazine: "Everybody says that I'm different on the days we're shooting the gore—that I'm just extra happy. I try to have that same excitement and enthusiasm for every scene, but when we're doing some really disgusting scene I'll catch myself gleefully jumping up and down at the monitor." And in another interview, he mused, "Hopefully, we'll get to the point where there are absolutely no restrictions on any kind of violence in movies."

Earth to Roth: we're at that point now. And now is also the time when millions of people around the world perceive the United States, rightly or wrongly, as having abandoned the moral high ground regarding the conduct of war and the treatment of prisoners. There is more freedom of expression in America than in any other country in the world, which is why Bousman and Roth can get away with their upchuck. But no one could accuse them of good timing.



## PARTHIAN SHOT

by Mark Helprin



# The New Soft Underbelly of Europe

**T**HOUGH NO LONGER THE CHIEF DELINQUENT OF EUROPE—and though not much thought is given to its strategic position—Germany is still Europe's center of gravity, territorially contiguous to more nations than any state except Russia, with compact interior lines of communication, Western Europe's largest population, and Europe's leading economy.

Facts like these assert themselves through every kind of historical fluctuation, even if America now sees Germany, the way-stop for airlifters en route to Iraq and Afghanistan, as a kind of giant aircraft carrier with sausages. But Germany is no doubt the subject of far deeper consideration on the one hand by Russia and on the other by jihadists.

The line from Paris to Moscow, which has been traveled from west to east by the French, east to west by the Russians, and in both directions by the Germans, is a road that invariably attracts continental powers on the brink of military predominance whether in fact or the imagination. During the Cold War it was responsibly fortified and blocked, but no longer. Whereas in 1989 we kept in Europe 325,000 troops, 5,000 tanks, 25 operating air bases, and 1,000 combat aircraft, we now keep approximately a fifth of that. Whereas the West Germans in 1989 could field a half-million men and 5,000 tanks, they now can deploy less than half that number.

As the Soviet Union dissolved, much of its military capacity followed it into oblivion. But as Western Europe dismantles its militaries, Russia builds, encouraged as much by European pacifism as by the Russian view of America's struggle in Iraq as a parallel to the Soviets' fatal involvement in Afghanistan. Like Germany between the wars, Russia is now eager and determined to reconstitute its forces, and with its new-found oil wealth, it is doing so.

How fortuitous for it, then, that the United States is expending military capital without replenishment, and Europe has spiritually resigned from its own defense, with Germany, for example, now devoting only 1.4% of its GDP to the task. Having been deeply humiliated in recent years, Russia is sure to seek redress if not in action then at least in the power to act. Nations behave this way, it has always been so, and as the balance of power in Europe and the world is shifting, Germany, the strategic gate to Western Europe and by its nature and position that which stabilizes or disrupts the continent, sleeps and dreams unaware.

Germany must fascinate the jihadists, too—not for displacing America as the prime target, but as the richest target least defended. Though it will never happen, they believe that Islam will conquer the world, and so they try. Unlike the U.S., Europe is not removed from them by an ocean, and in it are 50 million of their co-religionists among whom they can disappear and find support. Perhaps out of habit, Europe is also kind to mass murderers, who if caught spend a few years in a comfortable prison sharpening their resolve before they are released to fight again. In July the French sentenced eight terrorists connected to the murder of 45 people to terms ranging from one year, suspended, to ten years. In Spain, with 191 dead and 1,800 wounded, the worst offender will spend no more than 40 years

behind soft bars. Though in 2003 Germany found a September 11th facilitator guilty of 3,066 counts of accessory to murder and sentenced him to seven years (20 hours per person), he was recently retried and sentenced to 43 hours per person, not counting parole.

**B**UT MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE VARIATIONS IN EUROPEAN ATTITUDES and capabilities vis-à-vis responding to terrorism or nuclear blackmail are what make Germany such an attractive target. Unlike the U.S., France, and Britain, Germany is a major country with no independent expeditionary capability and no nuclear weapons, making it ideal for a terrorist nuclear strike or Iranian extortion if Iran is able to continue a very transparent nuclear policy to its logical conclusion. Though it is conceivable that after the shock of losing Washington or Chicago, the U.S.—or Britain after Birmingham, France after Lyons—would, even without an address certain, release a retaliatory strike, it is very unlikely that, even with an address certain, any nuclear power would launch in behalf of another nation, NATO ally or not, absent an explicit arrangement such as the dual-key structure during the Cold War.

Looking at Germany, then, Iran sees a country with nothing to counter the pressure of merely an implied nuclear threat. Jihadists see the linchpin of Europe, easy of access and inadvertently hospitable to operations, that will hardly punish those who fall into its hands, and that can neither accomplish on its own a flexible expeditionary response against a hostile base or sponsor, nor reply in kind to a nuclear strike. Thus the German government should be especially nervous about cargos trucked overland from the east.

What might be done? NATO could abandon the mistaken belief that Europe, having seen the end of history and the end of war, will always be in the clear. It could publicly make known to Russia that, for the purpose of maintaining the balance of power necessary to keep the gate to Western Europe closed and the prospects of war dim, it will judiciously and proportionally match Russian military expansion.

For its own protection, and thus that of Europe, Germany could more closely integrate and where appropriate reintegrate itself into the expeditionary and nuclear retaliatory structures of the U.S., Britain, and France, without moving nuclear weapons forward to German soil; end leniency for terrorists; step up defensive measures as if it is just about to be hit; and embrace limited missile defense against potentially nuclear-armed Iranian IRBMs rather than accept the Russian thesis that ten interceptors will perturb the nuclear equation.

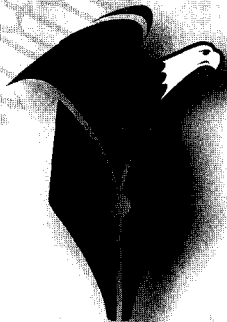
What are the chances of this? Though the West comprises the richest grouping of nations the world has ever seen, it has somehow come to believe not only that it is not entitled to its customary defenses but that it cannot afford them. And looking ahead strategically so as to outmaneuver crisis and war has, unfortunately, long been out of fashion.

*A version of this essay appeared in the Wall Street Journal.*

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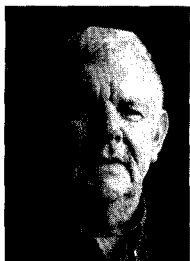
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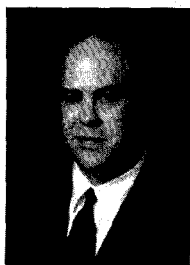
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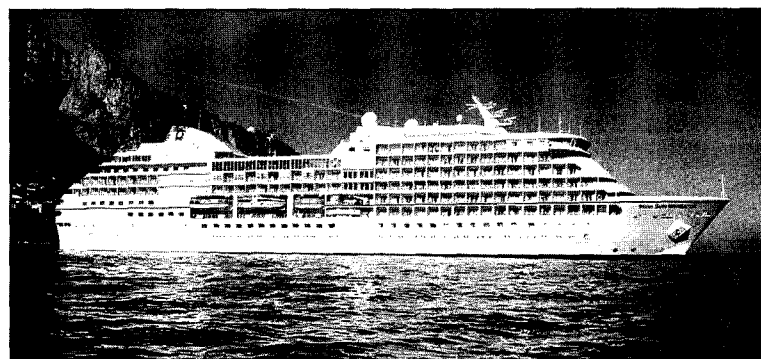
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In this Issue

Preoccupied with the daily news from Baghdad, we seem to think our generation is unique in experiencing the heart-break of an error-plagued war. We forget that victory in every war goes to the side that commits fewer mistakes—and learns more from them in less time—not to the side that makes no mistakes. A perfect military in a flawless war never existed—though after Grenada and the air war over the Balkans we apparently thought otherwise. Rather than sink into unending recrimination over Iraq, we should reflect about comparable blunders in America's past wars and how they were corrected. Without such historical knowledge we are condemned to remain shrill captives of the present.

Victor Davis Hanson  
"In War: Resolution"

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